This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Narcissus

by

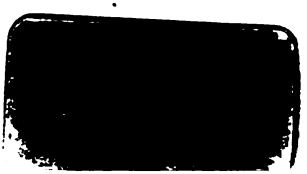
Viola Meynell

23698.97.125

Harvard College Library

FROM

Mrs. Theodore E. Nordbeck



NARCISSUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MARTHA VINE
LOT BARROW
MODERN LOVERS
COLUMBINE (*Third Impression*)

NARCISSUS

BY

VIOLA MEYNELL

SECOND IMPRESSION

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
1916

23678.17.125

HARVARD COLLEGE
Sept 19, 1939
LIBRARY

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO. LTD., LONDON
COLCHESTER AND ETON

To E. D.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
BOOK ONE : VICTOR	11
BOOK TWO : JIMMY	181

BOOK I

VICTOR

Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!

MODERN LOVE.

CHAPTER I

i

JIMMY read the part of *Papa* because there was no father. Victor was *Henry.*

PAPA. *I have noticed, Henry, that mamma often gives you some nice fruit.*

HENRY. *Yes, papa, that is so.*

PAPA. *Of all that she gives you, which is the kind of fruit that you prefer?*

HENRY. *The b-b-banana, papa.*

PAPA. *Now, Henry, have you ever considered where the banana comes from? We know it does not grow in mamma's cupboard, do we not?*

The original Henry will have smiled kindly at the humour of his papa's notion. Victor only rambled on with his convenient replies in his monotonous treble voice.

In the large low room where the boys sat they were surrounded by four walls of books. These were mostly in calf, and they seemed to send a mellow golden radiance out into the very atmosphere. In several of the books *Papa* figured, and as Mr. Carmichael had died when his sons were too young to remember him, their idea of the paternal relationship was centred round someone who dispensed information by these suave means. Jimmy, who always read him, sometimes added to *Papa's* voice a note of deep untimely sternness (it was apt to occur at any moment quite independently of what he might be saying). And they felt they had a fairly complete effigy of a father.

Jimmy was a year younger than Victor. But one good reason for his reading *Papa* was that *Henry* said so much less than the father, and in *Henry's* brief remarks Victor had hardly time to stammer. Had he read *Papa*, the proceedings would have been frequently delayed while some word played a ludicrous trick with Victor's tongue, doing something to it which he could not prevent.

The stillness of the house was such that they could often hear their mother's step when she was still a hundred yards down the lane. The plodding omnibus from Finchley had set her down nearly half a mile away at the dark turning of Dacre Lane. Some time before the omnibus stopped for her she had held her parcels tightly prepared, and at all the turnings she peered out.

"I'm not even sure if we've passed the Tally Ho Corner yet or not," she said to the other people, peering through the window into the dark. She was shy, but anxious for helpful friendly relations. And the other people peered through, too, and expressed an opinion. For in those days of slow leisurely journeys everyone had time to take an interest. At that hour the other passengers were generally like herself, well-dressed middle-class women with parcels. Often as she left the omnibus she said a general good-afternoon, in her reserved friendly way.

Even on days when it was still light Mrs. Carmichael never paid much heed to anything round her as she walked home in the long lane. On one side of her the fields were very neat and rich, as fields close to a town often are, being so accessible and limited that it is possible to give them almost the attention one gives to a garden. These fields belonged to a large London Dairy Company, and were so tidy and green as to form a recommendation of the firm.

Sometimes the boys left their books and ran out of doors when they expected her, and coming to the top

of the last steep bit of road looked down on her dark foreshortened figure, and she would feel them there more than see them there, because she always seemed obliged to look down at the road as she walked laboriously up. This bit of hill was so steep that the butcher often left his horse and cart tied to the lamp-post at the bottom, and made the short arduous ascent bringing the meat on a scrubbed wood carrier on his shoulder. Three or four times in the year coal came in two crammed carts, each drawn by one horse. At the bottom of the hill one horse would be taken from his cart and put in front of the other horse, and together they strained and tugged up the hill under the menace of the whip. Afterwards they returned with the empty cart and were both put to the full one. A boy could choose whether he would stamp and shout up the hill in company with the coalman, or stay on guard at the bottom with a great black cart bulging with coal-sacks, and imagine a horse in between the fallen empty shafts, and shout " Stand still ! " in a voice of threatening mastery.

Often the little family went excursions on the omnibuses running between Finchley, Barnet, and South Mimms. It was best when their mother could take the boys on top of the omnibus, making a little separate group in themselves with their faces turned towards space, nobody speaking to them. Before, when they were too young to clamber on top, and she had to take them inside, it was a much more public and conversational journey. Always people spoke to the children and then to the young mother; she knew their universal interest, and exactly how it would speak, and she was patient and polite and slightly embarrassed.

Many a time even the whole of the inside of the omnibus was concerned with them.

Once when a new passenger got in, Victor had to be dragged down from where he was kneeling

in the far corner to make room for her. He had been kneeling there absorbed. At the side of the advertisement which was pasted over the window he could just see one of the horses close underneath him—his tail not half a yard away from Victor's face through the glass. He watched the stiff movement of the tail as the horse ran. He watched the great strong flank of the horse shining close to him, fascinating him. His eyes feasted on its surface—a thing of unbelievable interest, looking neither quite like hair nor yet like flesh.

Then he felt himself being pulled down, and he resisted with wild anger and strength. His hands groped at what they could, and nothing served him: nothing would help him by holding on to him harder than he could hold on to it. Oh, the futility and the hatred! His face was scarlet, his knees and feet tried to hurt his mother, but were too close to her to hurt her. He felt the merciless overpowering strength of her arm, her arm that was stronger than his whole being. He threw himself back in a frenzy of anger.

Almost she gave up, she was nervous of the scene. But then the comments of the omnibus were against this. Everyone had something to say. They all grew a little excited and breathless, as if they were themselves struggling against that furious will.

"She's quite right," said one hotly; "she mustn't give way, it'd be no kindness to the child."

So she fought on.

"Another two years' time and he'd be struggling to stand down if he was wanted to sit," said another. "It'd be just the same just." There was universal concurrence with this vague sentiment.

And Victor struck wildly at his mother, and felt it was no use to strike. She was not a particularly big woman, but her bigness was appalling to him. It was such a torture to him to hit her arm and to feel that his

fist was hitting only a tiny little bit of her great arm, a little bit that was lost, that did not matter, and availed nothing.

He did not cry, he was in a silent frenzy, just awed enough to keep him silent. He was dragged down scarlet to the ground, beaten. He stood very still at his mother's knee. Then shame overtook him and he began to cry. He felt cruelly exposed standing there, and he bent down his ugly little face puckered up with quiet crying. That was the first time he had heard himself crying quietly, and it seemed desperately sad to him. He had on a little brass-buttoned navy-blue coat, so thick that in front where it was double-breasted he stood out in an unnatural stoutness. His little red cold hands, coming out from the thickness of the sleeves, lay harmless now on his mother's knee.

When they got out of the omnibus and walked home he said:

"I'm sorry, mum."

"Very well."

He gave a little angry tortured movement.

"I'm *sorry*," he shouted.

"That'll do," she said sharply.

His feet began to dance along the road.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" he shouted passionately.

"I can hear what you say; I don't want telling again," she said threateningly. "Now be quiet."

But all the way home he shouted his sorrow at her.

Even if they were both perfectly good there were always remarks addressed to her about the boys. There was one thing about them which frequently gave rise to comment in the omnibus or in shops, though she always hoped that it might pass. Victor had been born very fair; in after years, as he grew up, his hair became quiet and colourless, but now it was still flaxen, very bright. Jimmy's hair was nearly black.

"You'd never take them for brothers," a kind beaming lady opposite would say.

"No?"

"The father's fair, I suppose," said the lady, looking at Mrs. Carmichael's dark hair and complexion.

"No, he was fully as dark as I am."

Then, especially if she was a certain type of elderly lady, a little nameless, suspicious reserve would come over her, as she sat opposite to the dark mother and the yellow-haired child. And Mrs. Carmichael could never like Victor's fairness.

On top of the omnibus Victor leant over the front, watching the horses running; he had a kind of ecstasy of interest in things. His mother watched him uneasily; it always disquieted her to see him so given over, with no other consciousness.

"Mother, they love running," he said.

At first she did not answer, then she said:

"Soon they get tired fit to drop, but they still have to run just the same." She wanted him to know the sobering side of everything as well; he had too great an ecstasy of satisfaction, and it made her uneasy.

On rare occasions she took her boys into London to spend a day looking at the shops and public buildings. On these occasions the Great Northern Railway was, as it were, requisitioned to conduct them to King's Cross. Although they made the journey to King's Cross only ten times perhaps in the whole course of their childhood, as far as they thought about it the Railway's northern plan was achieved and justified when it carried the three of them from South Mimms and safely back again.

Two of these excursions took place fairly close together. The first had been so successful that they could not wait long before they went again. Never would they have believed, as they lay awake in excitement the night before, in what an unexpected trifling way this second excursion would be spoilt for them. Walking through the streets Jimmy and his mother

began to argue. Jimmy insisted that what his mother had before said was Oxford Street she now said was Regent Street. Mrs. Carmichael would not let this alone, and gradually, incredibly, it began to overshadow the day. It seemed impossible that all the excitement they had foreseen and planned should be entirely replaced by mere obstinate repetition of arguments on this point, and yet nothing could make Jimmy admit that he was wrong. He was fairly observant, and he remembered especially noticing the shape of a house in Oxford Street, and now he saw the same thing in Regent Street. His young blind logic made him sure: he could not possibly doubt the evidence of his own observation. The afternoon dragged wearily on, and they went home a little earlier than last time. They got out of the train and went down the dusky glimmering road, walking unusually quickly because they were exasperated. Mrs. Carmichael still talked. Jimmy was only indifferent and sure, not eager to convince, simply sure and satisfied—a slightly superior position, somehow, to hers.

"As if I should stand there and tell you black was white for no reason whatever. Now be a good boy, Jimmy," she appealed to him for the last time, "and say you remember now that mother told you it was Regent Street. Or just say you don't remember what she *did* say." Jimmy was kicking stones along as he walked, and was silent. "Well Victor knows better than you," she went on with her kind of soft fluent unwearied anger. "He's a clever truthful boy, and he'd never be so naughty as that. He wouldn't be so silly, for one thing, because he's too sensible." Inwardly Victor chafed under this praise, which even in his childish heart he knew perfectly well was simply meant to sting Jimmy to submission. He also knew that if he had made Jimmy's mistake it would not have mattered, it would not have spoilt the day. As it was, they ate their supper still in the

shadow of Jimmy's firm stand, and went gloomily to bed.

ii

Living mostly in the library, they grew to have that feeling about books which is something too close to be defined as a liking or a passion or an indifference, but which is simply an intimacy and a habit. They never cast it off. The shelves were not merely a placid background to all those daily scenes of life which took place in the midst of them. They were an important and progressive part of that life, perpetually giving themselves into the boys' hands, sometimes denying themselves when Mrs. Carmichael's haphazard but emphatic rule declared that certain shelves were too valuable to be tampered with, or in some way unsuitable. She had rather to guess which these were, but that did not make her law less positive. In the course of their childhood her rule was relaxed shelf by shelf, and the indulgence which ceded a new row of her husband's treasured books into their hands always absolved and justified itself by a most emphatic denial to them of another. So the books, as it were, grew in number and accessibility as the boys themselves grew, and even when they understood nothing of what was inside, something passed from a new book into them—something of its shape and aspect, some external impression which would always last.

Some day Mrs. Carmichael was going to have all the books out of the shelves in a general cleaning. Years went by while she still only threatened it. It was often a thing to talk about.

For their play the boys went out to Scrutton Grounds. This was a large, brown, deserted patch of land, part of the dairy company's property, but a part which they had never had a use for. It was not visible from the high road, and did not therefore spoil the smiling prospect of vivid pasturage, and it stayed as it was year after year. It

was like the one untidy cupboard in the neatest house. Its ridges and hillocks being often crowned by a tin or a boot or some disintegrating paper, it was impossible not to entertain a suspicion as to the nature of those hillocks right through. But even if Nature had not made them and they were simply rubbish throughout, they were at any rate so old-established that they had a surface that would pass for earth and that stood firm enough under the boys' rough feet, like proper hills, and were just as useful for the purposes which in their games they put them to.

They were discouraged from playing with tradesmen's boys (though of what surreptitious games took place in the remoter, hillier parts of Scrutton Grounds Mrs. Carmichael naturally could not be aware) and there were few available boys of their own class to vary their perpetual companionship. Mrs. Carmichael overlooked their reading spasmodically. Her one hope in the world was to rear them right. But she was often puzzled and beaten. She could not cope with Jimmy's obstinacy, and she loved him and all his ways too much to be able to rely on her own indignation with him. "Don't be so tiresome, dear," she sometimes said to him fretfully, her weak way of retiring vanquished from a contest of wills.

By her other son she was more certain to do her duty, his ill-temper never failing to provoke in her a proper return of ill-temper, sanctioned by authority. When he was angry with his wild futile anger she would quickly lose temper too, only with power and law on her side. She fought him with anger against anger. When Victor grew pale and stammered so that he could hardly speak and, words having deserted him, even glanced wildly round for other weapons, then she would become red, and bright-eyed, and look several years younger than she normally did, and in her face it could be seen how she was reckoning triumphantly that her arm was still the stronger.

Their anger subsided. Then she would go to her sitting-room where her sewing lay spread, her eyes still keen and her cheeks flushed, her random stitches only accurate by habit, while her mind flared with remembrance, acting it all over again.

"You won't put your brown suit on to-day? No? Then we'll see. Come along. Yes, I *will* drag you if you won't come of yourself." She dragged him harder than ever now in her imagination. "You wish I was a thousand miles away, do you? Yes, I daresay. And two can play at that game, let me tell you. I'm not exactly longing for *your* presence, my boy, I can assure you. Yes, that's what I might have said to him if I'd thought—not exactly longing . . ."

So the minutes flew by while she hardly knew it, and she sat scoring triumphs which gradually grew to have the flavour of magnanimity on her side as her colour began to fade and her mind became sad.

Thanks to her strong arm she could still discipline him, but it was what happened afterwards that made Mrs. Carmichael doubt if she could really manage Victor. While his mother went to her sitting-room to sew away her anger Victor would creep back to the library, while with terrible speed one after the other came the pangs of subsiding anger leaving him helpless in the hands of remorse. Perhaps he had hardly turned the library door-handle before the first pang came; as cruel a thing as can ever have happened to a child—his anger began to leave him. One evening he crept along the darkening library and suddenly, the pangs of his vanishing anger being too much for him, he lay down on the floor on a perfectly haphazard spot of the worn brown carpet; he lay, fitting badly between the straight drop of the dark tablecloth with its little plush pompoms at the bottom, and the back legs of a large chair. His wretchedness laid him down just there.

As he crept in and lay down and began to sob, a

little figure rose up against the window, where the last grey light was coming in. Jimmy rose up and closed his book and waited a moment, then went and stood over Victor.

"Never mind," he said.

Victor flung out his legs and sobbed on.

"Stop—it doesn't matter," said Jimmy.

Victor turned wildly over, pushing out his arms, curling them in, sobbing more.

Quickly Jimmy looked round for his book; his feelings were being worked upon unbearably. He got his book and went quickly and quietly away.

Victor's repentance was therefore regarded as the real naughtiness. His mother could do nothing with it; she could neither threaten nor cajole him out of it. Sometimes while the anger which had sprung up to deal with his anger was still full upon her she would say to him quickly in a wrathful warning: "I forgive you, Victor. Now mind, I forgive you!" But that was of no use. And Jimmy always went away from it all, hiding himself somewhere where he could no longer hear. Then Victor, ill and disfigured, would go to his mother and stare at her with a strange mixture of terrible curiosity and despair, and say, "I'm sorry." Even if she were still angry she forgave him quickly, eagerly. As if she had not spoken his voice came again: "Mother, I'm sorry!" with a sound of threat in it, and she could only look on at his torture, because her forgiveness was never enough for him.

iii

So she sent them away to school at the end of the summer. She had written to Mr. Rendel, who had been her husband's friend, and he had recommended the school at Reading to which he sent his own boy, Clifford. Mrs. Carmichael was quite taken up with the idea of their going. By just a little she surpassed

the excitement which the boys themselves felt; she never relaxed from the idea.

Her excitements died quick inevitable deaths, and could not always last out the actual events. The night before they left there came into the boys' hearts the peculiar thrilling fear of the imminent adventure, but their mother's excitement was by now worn out and expired. Her preparations for them were complete. There was a long time to wait the next day, for they did not leave until the afternoon. In the morning Mrs. Carmichael suddenly began her attack on the books, to clean them. She was a strong, spare woman; she lifted the books in large loads with her strong arms. She did not want anyone near.

When it was time for the boys to go she hurried out, a little astray and surprised, with a handkerchief wound round her head. The boys drove away with the maid who was taking them, and the sun was an enormous red ball hanging in the beginning of a melancholy grey dusk over Scrutton Grounds. Mrs. Carmichael turned back into the house and realized that they had gone.

CHAPTER II

i

At school Victor was odd and separate. It was not so much that the boys laughed at his stammer: he did not particularly mind their doing that. In fact he generally joined good-humouredly in the laugh (at which it would strangely die away; they did not want to laugh at it if he laughed too). But he was scorned because of the combination in him of assertiveness and failure. All the fire of his personal ambitions was found to be a kind of stage flame, nothing to do with real heat, and the boys taunted his pride—just as they might have put their hands into that unreal flame. He had a way of assuming to himself rights of participation in the best of everything—friendships, games, schemes. He pushed with his odd manner that was at once boastful and defensive into everything, and at first the boys were impressed. He pushed aggressively in, and then they resented that he could do nothing to justify himself, and they made him suffer for it. They made him suffer by making conspicuous his failures. If he had not pushed himself forward he could have had a quiet, negative career. The boys, resenting the prominent position he gave himself, made it even more prominent. They as it were held up his failures before himself and before the school—his inarticulateness, his weak body, his wild, ineffective way of playing games. They punished him by holding him in the light. This tortured his nerves; also he was often ill, several times spending a large part of the term in the infirmary.

He had a very silent boyhood. He had a habit of helping himself out by a gesture and by his eyes, which continued intently to speak after the words had stopped. He was often being not completely understood. His inarticulateness prevented him from getting into direct relationship with any subject. And the result was that not only was he misunderstood, but he was himself perpetually off the track of understanding, slightly out of true touch with things. When he learnt a thing he often learnt it a little wrong. "A verb is a word which signifies 'to be,' 'to do,' or 'to suffer.'" He took it unthinking into his brain, and all his life any talk of suffering had for him a faint grammatical connexion. He was often absorbed in the unessential thing in a lesson—not taking in what he was supposed to be learning, but something incidental. The sentences he had to translate into French or English could absorb him with their mere meaning.

Have you seen my father in the garden?
No, but your sister's large pencil is on the black table.

Monsieur Pascal est le père de René.
René est le fils de Monsieur Pascal et le frère de Louise.

The dog is faithful, the cat is false.

It fascinated him, as a story. And he must probe into it and enlarge it in his mind. He never remembered that the chief reason for these sentences was not their plot, such was his absorption in their suggestiveness to his imagination.

In the Bible lessons he was exasperated by the quick succession of generations. He would make a vivid mental picture of Abraham, a slight youth, fair, not perfectly understood by the people round him, not fluent in his speech—in fact, stammering, but thinking deep, inexpressible thoughts. And then when Victor had thoroughly identified himself with Abraham,

Abraham grew old and died. Victor hated the ending of that career. He started again with Isaac, then Jacob. Then soon: "Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see." So he died. With Joseph he identified himself more than all. "And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die."

Jimmy went placidly through his school. He was not clever, but he became very popular.

When they went home for the holidays their mother took stock of the change in them. "Mother, we're going out for a bit," they said, and she remembered how they used to be afraid in the street if they lost sight of her. Sometimes it seemed to her as if they came back not so much to her as to the library. They knew if a book was out of place. She did not go in there much now. She used not to go in to her husband there.

One day in a warm spring they sat in the library. Jimmy was reading aloud. He sat at the table sprawling over the book, while Victor lay on the sofa with restless hands but an expression of listening in his eyes. The splendid Easter sun was creeping round and changing the room, and both together they grew impatient. The words began to fly meaninglessly from Jimmy as he thought of Scrutton Grounds, but still he read on because the end was near.

"*I close this letter,*" read Jimmy at last, "*by adding a few words on the expression* 'Dearest.' *A gentleman once began a letter thus, to his bride:* '*My* dearest *Maria.*' *The lady replied:* '*My dear John,—I beg that you will mend either your morals or your grammar. You call me your* '*dearest Maria*'*; am I to understand that you have other Marias?*'"

Victor gave a sudden little irrepressible laugh. Jimmy banged the book shut.

"*Dearest!*" said Victor from the sofa, and laughed again. Jimmy looked doubtingly at him. They went to the door, but before he opened it

Victor turned and said in a kind of daring, low voice:

"*Darling* M-m-maria!"

Now they both gave little uncontrollable bursts of quiet laughter, and then ran fast to Scrutton Grounds.

ii

Passing over the boys to the care of Mr. Loseby, of Reading, was with Mrs. Carmichael a very complete transference of authority. Now when Victor's ill-temper made a storm in the house she no longer thought it necessary to lose her temper in return. She trusted to Mr. Loseby to lose his, when a similar thing should occur at school. But she watched the boys' characters and would come out with some carefully planned sentence to do them good.

One summer after Victor had wasted a term in illness at school, Mrs. Carmichael took the boys to Clifton for their holiday, and they spent their time on Durdham Downs. Victor was never robust, but he grew fairly strong again. Their mother could walk far with them, always with her head a little bent, taking her holiday as a solid business, commenting on whatever was strange. One day during this time she noticed that Jimmy had grown taller than herself. Almost imperceptibly he was taller: she felt a thrill of worship for him. Victor was smaller made, and did not quite come up to her. In the end he stopped growing exactly when he reached her height.

Down in the low-lying parts of Bristol by the river there was a long, brown building on which was painted in giant black letters: Nathl. Rendel, Manufacturer. And higher up in the town, at No. 7 Colonnade, the Rendel family lived and exchanged visits with the Carmichaels. Clifford Rendel was their school-fellow and Jimmy's friend, and every day he came out of the dun cloud of Bristol, up through layers

of chocolate-scented atmosphere, through the steep terraces of balconied houses, still up near to the blue sky over Durdham Downs, to be with the Carmichaels.

Mr. Rendel was a widower, and his house had an indefinable air of being competently managed by servants. He left it punctually every morning, but did not return punctually every night. He and Mr. Carmichael had been at school together nearly forty years ago, and Mr. Rendel now fought against the flesh to try and make a good show of friendliness to Mrs. Carmichael. But he had come to a time of life when the habit of his work and pleasures was fixed, and when that time comes it is almost impossible to break it. He performed his civilities by proxy; his housekeeper showed a great deal of attention to Mrs. Carmichael.

Imogen Rendel had her twelfth birthday a few days after the Carmichaels first came to Clifton, and her father gave her a box for an afternoon performance at the theatre. The affair had been planned and the seats assigned some time before the Carmichaels' arrival, so that Imogen could not invite them. But on the very day of the party one of the expected children fell ill, and a note was sent hurriedly to Mrs. Carmichael from the housekeeper. "Will your son come?" it said. "We are so sorry there is only one place."

Which of them should go? Their mother thought long and anxiously. Jimmy did not care, and she wanted him to go. She wanted to refuse the exaggerated passion of desire she saw in Victor. He looked at her almost with a threat in his eyes. She had to let him go because he was the eldest.

"Mind, it won't be all you think it's going to be," she said uneasily as he left.

As long as he lived he never told anyone what happened when he was shown into the drawing-room at No. 7 Colonnade, where the children were assembling. The shock of it lasted through his life if ever he

happened to think of it; it was never thrown back into the perspective which the other events of his life should gradually have given it.

He was fifteen, he was conscious of his carefully brushed hair and best clothes; he was always looking for occasions on which he could shine successful, and he felt now as if this whole party was about to centre round his attractiveness which it was sure to recognize.

Presiding over the party was the housekeeper. Once a housemaid, she had three years ago ventured to lay aside her cap, and in each succeeding year had acquired new dignities and responsibilities, until now in expensive black satin she was a kind of respectful hostess.

It was to her that Imogen ran in a sudden excitement of disappointment and whispered what Victor just happened to hear.

"The wrong one's come," she said, dismayed. "I meant the other one!"

Across her brightness there was for a few moments this fretful cloud. And then she forgot, and shone and laughed again.

CHAPTER III

i

THEY often read questions and answers. A number of the books in the shelves were written in that form, and they sought them out. The habit of reading these aloud had grown with them from their earliest childhood. If the door was open Mrs. Carmichael heard their voices as she went about. For herself she generally sat in one of the many other rooms of the large house, frequently changing the furniture in a burst of energy. But the library she never changed; it was always the same for them. The very atmosphere of the room seemed to defy outside influences, for in summer it had the coolness of its own separateness, and in winter it was never terribly cold even on the worst days; the books sent out into it something that was not warmth but had too much flavour and age for cold.

Victor always made the inquiry and Jimmy always exhaustively replied. From the very nature of this distribution Victor's part was humble and eager as of one devoured by intelligent curiosity, and Jimmy's unendingly resourceful and informative. It was impossible for Victor to put a question at all triumphantly, to feel he was planting an awkward inquiry into the very heart of a difficulty, when under *A* the perfect appropriate answer was printed below, and Jimmy's lips were already opening to pronounce it.

Sometimes almost unconsciously Victor was able to put some dissatisfaction into his tone, as if to imply that the replies were not altogether adequate.

"*Can you not give* one *familiar instance to explain the difference between M-m-mode and Substance?*" he asked, putting into his voice a scorn and emphasis of his own.

But the perfect composed reply came at once.

"*Yes. If we reflect on a round piece of wax, it is plain that wax is a thing which may subsist without the roundness,*" &c.

And sometimes the questions sank to a depth of subservience. At the end of a long disquisition from Jimmy, Victor's part would be nothing more than simply to break the paragraph, with some such phrase as:

"*Have you any more to add?*"

"*Yes,*" replied Jimmy at once. "*Modes are further divided into Natural and Supernatural, Civil and Moral,*" &c.

"*Is* this *all you have to say concerning M-m-modes?*" asked Victor, again with his scornful suggestive emphasis.

"*No,*" replied Jimmy. "*It is proper to observe that . . .*" and off he went again.

Even in another kind of argument, when Victor was more than a mere questioner, and had something to say on his own account, at the best he was identified with highly reprehensible views, and in the end was reduced to saying:

"*I cannot withstand the f-force of your reasoning; I am now thoroughly sensible of the absurd c-c-consequences of my opinion.*"

One year Clifford Rendel came home with them for the summer holidays. The library was neglected then, and there were almost daily journeys on the Great Northern, though visits to town were never allowed to interfere with cricket practice every evening on the pitch which had been almost miraculously extracted from Scrutton Grounds. Scrutton Grounds was precisely the same now as in their earliest recollec-

tion of it. In its less refined parts it collected its rubbish as mysteriously as ever. Hats and boots and tins and strange, unexpected objects, like an old pair of opera-glasses and a tin basin, which at first looked good but then was found to have one small hole in it, were accumulated by Scrutton Grounds, but there was never the slightest clue as to how those things came to be there; they might have been the product of the soil; there was never a lurking figure to be seen on this deserted waste to account for the sudden addition of a broken, battered coal-scuttle. Scrutton Grounds kept the secret.

But from the place where the stumps stood totteringly in the hard ground, and the bat, in the hands of one of the boys, made its little nervous movements of expectancy in the crease and then rose at the moment to smite the ball, and where the ball, hard hit, was probably conveniently fielded by a rubbish-mound, the prospect was very fair and peaceful. The pasture-fields lay around; they were exceedingly green, and the cows' leisurely movements and rich colour were shone upon by the sun, which seemed to acknowledge the peculiar claims of these tidy fields. The dairy company had lately put its herdsmen into smocks.

In other directions change was taking place. One day men came with a ladder and ropes and saws and cut short the branches of the great row of elms that skirted one side of the half-mile of lane from the high road to the Carmichaels' house, and even drastically sawed them off in the main trunk in their thick part before they had begun to taper. It took a long time to get used to the round, white, carpentered ends of the branches, and all that next winter they looked utterly unlike anything that could ever grow; they were more like giant furniture left out in the rain and mist. The next spring and summer only thinly veiled the flat sawn ends.

ii

Otherwise change did not come up Dacre Lane. It came creeping stealthily from behind. While Mrs. Carmichael went long journeys on foot down Dacre Lane to the small shops, and on by slow omnibus to the larger ones, creeping on her from behind were shops and villas, and in that direction—and not much more than half a mile away—another high road was running new electric trams right from town. Long after these trams were running, and long after new shops had come, larger and cheaper and nearer, for the Carmichaels the way into the world was still by Dacre Lane. Mrs. Carmichael still bought her meat at the sawdusted little shop with a vase of wild flowers in the midst of the meat, nearly a mile away from her house, while at a less distance the competitive prices of the "Home and Colonial" proclaimed themselves in vain.

But Victor rushed for anything new, and he immediately began to use the tram to go into town. And soon he made his mother come one winter's day. They were an ordinary looking couple, not speaking much, the mother in her bottle-green skirt and tight black jacket and a dark bear fur round her neck. The fur was new, and every now and then she remembered it with lingering satisfaction. She glanced at it where it fell with its fine, harsh hairs thickly on her breast. "Really, with a good piece of fur one can't help looking well-dressed," those glances seemed modestly to confess.

And the boy, who somehow failed to look a young man, more through unimportance than through want of years, still wore a cap and had a cut in the knee of his grey flannel trousers. Very soon he began to take an acute interest in clothes, to bear no longer the mark of a boy's carelessness but that of a young man's stealthy ambition for conquest.

To-day he was in a gay, hopeful mood; he had his wild optimism concerning himself. He was always feeling that someone must suddenly discover what he was, something rare in him to thrill people. The sun shone and the streets looked gay this afternoon, and he felt such happiness in him that he thought it must make him strange and important to his mother.

"Come up on top," he said to her.

She looked unwilling. She had been observing a couple in the corner, and did not want to trouble herself.

"Come on," he said.

"You go by yourself, I'm comfortable where I am. Only don't get down without me."

But he went on urging her, thinking that his making her go up there into the sunshine with him was part of his wonderful success that he felt radiating out from him. So she had to go, reluctantly, peevishly, taking a last look at the man and woman she had liked to watch.

After a long drive they found themselves set down in Kilburn, and Mrs. Carmichael wanted to take another tram straight home again. Victor suggested going on to Oxford Street and having tea there at a restaurant. His slight, narrow face had a curious pride and intensity in it; he wanted them to be happy together; he would show her that he knew where to take her; he would order her a tea. . . .

It was not in little ways like this that he really eventually meant to demonstrate his powers; it was in far deeper, grander ways that he intended to make people happy and to be happy himself, linked to all the greatness of the world. But as day after day went by without bringing conditions in which it was possible to convey that, it was good enough instead to give an impression of excelling merely in little incidental things. He had almost persuaded her to come when she suddenly grew firm against it, and

would not leave Jimmy to have his tea alone. He felt abashed and incredulous. How had she failed to understand what he had been offering her ?

It took him some time to be thoroughly depressed. As they hurried to catch the tram he still felt as if he were especially tall and well-dressed, and he helped his mother on to the tram impressively. But all the way home he grew more and more baffled. Had he only a mean little soul after all ? Because that is what his mother's refusal made him feel he had. It was dark now. He felt quite alone and shut off from her, especially when she shut her eyes every time the lights went out as the tram grated over the points.

They approached their house by the new-made road of little red villas, some looking exceedingly finished with a gate and wooden paling growing very stark and arbitrary out of the mud about twenty feet in front of the house, others still looking bound and repressed by scaffolding, with the unpartitioned mud wallowing up to their very walls. The road was indeed so muddy with the building and the rain there had been that Mrs. Carmichael had to hold her skirts high, a look of disgust on her face.

They came to the corner of Dacre Lane and their own house. The house was large and square-looking, of the Regency period, with narrow, black woodwork to its tall windows. There were three broad, shallow steps circling out from the front door, and a flat porch of two pale fluted pillars, with a blunt-pointed pediment in the same creamy plaster. A large fanlight over the door was ribbed with rays of thin woodwork, black-painted. In front of the house there was a shrubbery of variegated laurel and holly bushes, and a broad path skirting the shrubbery came like a modest drive sweeping past the front door. The shrubs were dull and dark, and instead of brightening the place in winter, as they were supposed to do, they really only depressed it in summer.

Inside, it was all spacious and clean, but the furniture was of a particularly haphazard kind: never were there two adjacent objects matching in kind or value. In the hall there stood a piece of iron piping with some irises and bulrushes and butterflies painted on it, and in this the father's walking-stick still stood among the umbrellas. And near it was an old oak coffer, rare because of its drawers, with no design but "1650" carved out of the side in beautiful figures. A cheap rack of hat-pegs hung on the wall. Every room told the same tale of one rare, careful purchase to a dozen indifferent expedient ones. Only in the library there seemed to be a single jealous ambition.

They had tea to-day in a little room where a canary whistled in a cage. A large black cat, wanting to go away to the kitchen, sat erect immediately in front of the crack of the closed door, its back to the room, its head slightly raised, gazing at the crack. There was a white muslin curtain fastened right across the window, which looked on to the disastrous edge of Scrutton Grounds. On one side of the room where they had tea Mrs. Carmichael's sewing-machine stood. She worked in different rooms; often as she sat quietly sewing she would be planning afresh the arrangement of the room she sat in, her eyes growing more determined and her mouth more set as she planned. So that for the boys all the rooms in the house were a little strange and uncertain, frequently surprising them, in a way that Jimmy hated. Even their bedrooms were changed. These moves were never commented on among them, there being a slight embarrassment, created by Jimmy's disapproval.

She enjoyed telling Jimmy about the ride, more than she had enjoyed the ride itself. He listened. He was taller and stronger than Victor, and altogether looked more vividly alive, with bright dark-blue eyes and warm colour of health and life in his face.

"Another cup, Victor?" said Mrs. Carmichael.

"No thanks."

"Will you, Jimmy?"

"No, thanks."

"Are you sure?"

"No, not any more."

He got up and opened the door for the cat, who hesitated for several moments and then walked slowly out.

"Have half a cup, dear," she persuaded him.

"Just half, then," he said indifferently.

He strolled back to the table, his hands in his pockets, his hair a little ruffled over his handsome, glowing face. He had come from the library.

"By the way, you were wrong about that Herrick being a perfect copy," he said to Victor with a slight smile.

"No I'm not."

"Yes, it's got a facsimile page."

"No it hasn't."

Victor stared at him defensively. They often disputed over the books, about some name or date, never things of meaning. Jimmy did not touch on questions of meaning, but about the other things he was generally right. Victor felt bitterly that he would be right now. And it would be somehow all against the truth for him to be right. If the point had been more essential he would have been wrong. Victor knew how over and over again when they had been reading together he had understood and Jimmy had not.

Now Jimmy fetched the book, and in a complacent, careless way showed that he was right. Again Victor felt baffled, as if a narrow little soul had been thrust into him.

"I've thought of a career for myself," said Jimmy. They often spoke of this because they were about to leave school. "I had better be a librarian. How does that sound, mother?"

"Well, it sounds rather common. What, passing out the books?"

"No. Looking after some famous old library, making catalogues, and all that."

Victor wished intensely that he had thought of this for himself. It sounded to him the one career he would have chosen. He wondered if he could not slip in before Jimmy.

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Carmichael. "I suppose there are all kinds of things I've never thought of. Well, in that case Victor had better go into his Uncle Sidney's business. There's the opening, waiting for one of you."

"No fear," said Victor angrily. He sometimes felt they were killing the life in him.

"Oh. Perhaps you'll give your reason," said Mrs. Carmichael. She was always on her guard when she was alone with Victor, but when Jimmy was there she liked to speak out.

"I will if I like," said Victor. "Not otherwise." While he spoke there was a hot flash across his brain.

"You might do much worse than go into that," said Jimmy in a friendly, confidential way, as if he knew he could say with impunity what would anger Victor from his mother. "Plenty of time left to do what you want. If I hadn't got on to this new tack I should have been jolly glad to go into it, I daresay."

But Victor's narrow face paled and his eyes grew dark; he looked ugly when he was angry. But he said nothing to Jimmy.

"You'd far better make up your mind to it, Victor," said Mrs. Carmichael.

Then Victor jumped to his feet.

"I tell you one thing. I'll do w-w-w——"

They waited.

"What I like!" he shouted.

"All right," she said quickly, as if she were warding

something off. She had given up losing her temper with him.

Again Victor felt that blinding flare in his brain, and he stared wildly out. He felt he was showing them that he had a big soul, immeasurably bigger than theirs. He felt grand, his spirit towering above them.

"I'm not g-g-going to sit at a desk all day. I won't spend my life selling nibs and—and—" he could not think what else to say; he could not think of a single other property of a stationer's business.

"No one's forcing you," said Jimmy indifferently.

"You think that's all I'm fit for, but I can tell you I'm fit for something a jolly sight b-b-better than that. Yes."

Mrs. Carmichael had to speak.

"Very well, Victor, you seem to know what you're fit for, so you do it," she said with controlled excitement.

"Yes," said Victor, "and damn—damn—you won't decide for me!" He picked up the chair that was against him and threw it violently to the ground. The thin wooden chair cracked in places. Even before his noise had yet subsided he cast a quick fearful look at Jimmy.

His brother sat very still, uneasy. His face showed a keen, sensitive dissatisfaction, and Victor kept looking at him. As he looked, his anger was giving way in his heart, breaking down unmercifully, and leaving him defenceless to face his misery. He was waiting and dreading, for he knew what Jimmy would do. He would go away, and stay for hours and hours. That was what he did when there was a scene like this, and to Victor it was torture that he should go.

Jimmy got up and went away. They had a last view of his keenly dissatisfied face as he half-turned at the door. Victor sat rigid with terror and despair, a prey to the terrible exaggeration that came upon

him. His eyes hunted slowly about the darkening room, along the walls, and among the chairs and tables and sofa. For one moment, as he noticed for the first time that his mother had changed the photograph of his father that stood on a little table, it seemed as if that might distract him if only for a minute, but it was not enough, and his repentance leapt on him again with a sickening rush. The house was very still, and no sound of hammering came now from the building at the back, for the men had gone. The maid came in and cleared the table. Mrs. Carmichael began to move about. She went out of the room.

"Where's Jimmy?" said Victor as she came back.

"I don't know."

"Is he in the library?"

She did not need to answer. She shook out her work with a flicking sound and folded it. And Victor knew he would not have gone into the library where he might easily be followed.

"Damn, damn!" said Victor under his breath, but in a moment tears came stealing down the face that was almost a man's face.

iii

He was left alone in the dark. He could not turn his thoughts away from Jimmy. He could not face the hours during which Jimmy was certain to stay away out of sight. He so loathed himself that he did not feel as though he were alone in the room but as if he were imprisoned with someone who was offensive to him. He thought of Jimmy gone away to grieve, and it tore at his heart.

He resolved to find Jimmy, daringly. There was always something so decisive and absolute about Jimmy's retirements from these periodical scenes that neither Victor nor his mother had ever followed him. That disappearance of Jimmy's was the price Victor

had to pay for his blind rage. He always stayed away for some hours. What was he doing? He stayed away so long that when he came back everything was calm and normal. Was he suffering all that time?

Victor slowly kicked his way out of the room. His mood of repentance always came so quickly on the top of his anger that it still had, as it were, the habits and manifestation of his temper; his feet hated the ground as he walked, they kicked with a spasm of hate any wall or door they came in contact with. He was suffering an almost intolerable contrition and yet it expressed itself through the same channels as his anger had done.

He went a useless journey to the library, looked in, and banged the door furiously as he came away. But after that he suddenly began to go very quietly, for now there was something stealthy and new in looking any farther afield for Jimmy.

Quietly he mounted the stairs. He had to go; it fascinated him with fear to think of Jimmy hiding. He carried in his mind the picture of Jimmy's face as it always was when he withdrew from the scene, its almost tortured unwilling dissatisfaction.

He stood outside Jimmy's bedroom door; his fingers stole round the handle and turned it. The loudest thing was his own breathing and he made it quiet. The room was fairly dark but not black. There was a huddled mass upon the bed, and at first he thought it was Jimmy, but he became aware of a flatness and an improbability of outline in that mass upon the bed; it turned into the mere flat muddle of a discarded suit, and Victor came away and went quietly along the passage, the adventure not over yet, hardly begun, nothing known, and everything possible.

He looked into several rooms and mounted some more stairs. At the end of the upstairs passage there was another little narrow passage giving off from it, leading to one disused room—not full like a lumber

room, but holding a certain amount of furniture for which there was no room anywhere else, so that it had two wardrobes and some odd tables.

All was dark on this landing until Victor in his noiseless slippers turned into the narrow passage, and then he stopped suddenly, for at the end the door was ajar and light streamed through.

He did not have to go on far in order to see Jimmy. Making a slow, noiseless advance he saw him framed in the door. His face was a little turned away but not enough to conceal its perfect placidity, suddenly touched with the pure amusement of one who smiles when he is not watched, simply because he must. He was reading by candle-light, and every now and then he gave that smile of pure involuntary amusement, slowly or suddenly, dying away and coming again.

Once he put out his hand and without taking his eyes from his book groped for something on the wash-stand at his side. His hand found what it sought; he brought a large bit of toffee to his mouth, bit off a piece, and put the rest back, groping, still reading, while his smile came and went.

CHAPTER IV

i

THEY left school at the same time. Though Jimmy was a year younger than Victor, and was not particularly clever, yet he went ahead of him, and they left only just in time to avert the spectacle of the younger one's conspicuous advancement over the other. To the end Victor went through his lessons distracted, misunderstanding, his deep, absorbed thought given to something slightly off the track. And part of his very last term he spent in the infirmary.

Nothing happened at once when they left school. Clifford Rendel left at the same time, and so did several other of their friends. So they did not seem to have left school behind, they continued to *be* the school, only dispersing it, scattering it, changing it into a kind of social organization, in which young men lived at home and wrote bald notes of invitation to each other, met at the Oval, and occasionally went to each other's houses. With Clifford, intercourse was of course much more constant and intimate than that. He was staying in London with his aunt, and he spent a good deal of time with the Carmichaels. His aunt was rich and indulgent, and it was Clifford who was the first to blossom out into dress clothes and careful socks and ties. Victor watched these things, impressed, and began to do the same. Jimmy hardly noticed, and did not care.

Clifford's town quarters being a house of considerable state, and his aunt having the importance of being

married to a member of parliament, he was always treated by Mrs. Carmichael as a visitor of some distinction; and when he came strolling in, saying in his pleasant way: "How do you do, Mrs. Carmichael —Jimmy about?" she told him with interest where he should find Jimmy, or put down her work and went to the foot of the stairs and called.

One day when Clifford came, from the library window Victor watched him and Jimmy go out together. They would have had no objection to Victor's coming too, though it would not occur to them to ask him, neither had he any resentful sense of exclusion as he watched them. He was simply taking in carefully the details of Clifford's light brown suit, his whole large easy air, as the two walked down past the sunless shrubbery and away. Bowler hats were being worn with wide brims that year, and Victor noticed Clifford's brim with an expert eye as he stood narrow and insignificant in his worn flannel suit watching them. He resolved to have precisely the same kind of thing himself. In his navy blue school cap, with the school's purple badge stamped on the front, and with plenty of money in his pocket, he soon went out himself.

Jimmy and Clifford walked to the trams through the building operations that were going on in the muddy roads. The local landscape gardener was surveying the ground, sorting out the mud into potential paths and borders and lawns. The portentous manner in which this artist was dealing with the possibilities which his severely limited space afforded him struck Jimmy as sufficiently absurd to justify a short pause. Outside the tram they turned up their collars every now and then when quick showers of summer rain came sparkling down. They reached Oxford Street, and lounged about, looking in at the shop windows. Clifford Rendel already looked at shop windows with the air of the rich connoisseur,

who rejects. A motor-bicycle in a window which Jimmy admired he scorned as being already obsolete in some of its parts.

"I'd as soon go round on a push-bike," he said disgustedly, and drew Jimmy on.

The sun began to shine more steadily and serenely, and all colour—of the western sky and of the sunshine itself—was deepening, not with darkness, but simply with more colour. The faces of the passers-by were deep and bright in the sun; people glanced at Clifford as he went by. He was tall and broad and he had fair hair and light blue eyes. His face was a little florid and very open and pleasing. He was only nineteen but he looked as though he were twenty-two or three.

He did most of the talking. He had plenty of comment and criticism and anecdote, and Jimmy spoke little, listening with his separate content. That was the nature of their intercourse always. On some days Clifford completely forsook Jimmy for some more live and vivacious companion, but he always came back to him, to his safe even presence, which had a curious perpetual attraction. It did not worry him that Jimmy should be content only to hear of his exploits—his box at the Tivoli one night and an expensive supper afterwards with three other young men, his adventures at an art student's fancy-dress ball . . . it was indeed amusing to have him unparticipating, to recount things to him the next day.

But on the other hand it was possible at times to resent this aloofness of Jimmy's.

ii

Two girls came out of the side-door of a dressmaker's workrooms just in front of them, cast a look round, and hurried off in a self-conscious walk that carried

them with a lot of bustle over a very little amount of ground. Clifford and Jimmy, going along at their strolling pace, kept easily close behind them, Clifford slightly increasing their speed in order to do this. A slow amused smile came on his handsome face, half rejecting half tolerant, while they walked in twos close together down the street.

The girls had their hair partly tied up, each with an enormous bow at the back. Their bright faces kept turning to each other, so that their profiles could well be seen from behind; they were very pretty. They kept up a constant laugh, for reasons which they conveyed to each other almost in whispers, so close upon them were the two young men. Occasionally one glanced right round, boldly but shyly, and met Clifford's whimsical understanding smile.

Jimmy did not protest or lag behind, but as he walked on just the same as before, indefinably he was not involved, and his complete detachment affected Clifford unpleasantly. He began to think Jimmy intolerably dull. Some shocked remonstrance or embarrassment he would not have so much disliked, but Jimmy's absolute separateness contrived somehow to make Clifford feel foolish in his sensations. Jimmy's detachment seemed to expose Clifford to ridicule; it made the smile on his face feel stupid. When the girls turned round a corner with suppressed laughs and rapid glances behind, Clifford and Jimmy went straight forward on their way, and Clifford only once glanced back to meet the now prolonged backward stare of the girls, suddenly divested of their shyness.

The sun was turning to deeper and deeper gold. At Marble Arch the omnibuses came up one after the other full on the top, and they waited on the crowded pavement for places.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Clifford.

"What's the matter?"

"Isn't that the hope of the Carmichaels standing over there, look?"

They made out Victor standing in the throng. It was somehow funny to see him; he looked odd. They both gave a little pleased involuntary laugh, suddenly seeing him in comparison with other people. His slightly defensive eyes and his too-narrow face gave him a look at once arresting and unimportant. All his life he could curiously look afraid and over-confident at the same time. Clifford surprised him by coming up behind and knocking into him with some violence, murmuring an apology. He turned his untamed defensive anger on them with extraordinary readiness, wavered between anger and recognition, and then smiled. He was exaggeratedly pleased to meet them; this encounter in the splendid sunshine made him feel he was in the middle of life; he saw himself as one of three gay and successful young men —the success suddenly fitted him like bright armour.

They all three scrambled on to the top of an omnibus, quick and determined, pushing their way. So they went home in the summer evening, Clifford going part of the way with them. They travelled into the northern sunset, and the breeze came freshly into their faces as the strong patient horses went quickly, gathering vigour from the evening air.

They were not sitting together, and Jimmy was separate at some distance. Clifford, exactly in front of Victor, turned to talk to him, his arm over the back of the seat, his blue eyes suddenly showing his conscious tolerant smile as he looked at the girl who sat by Victor's side.

Victor, in contrast to Jimmy, did not for one moment remain aloof from the sensual suggestiveness of Clifford. Something of him leapt up to take it from Clifford, to take it to himself, and with quick realization he too looked at the girl, long and cruelly, while his heart beat in an intense excitement as he felt her

closeness, her helplessness. She gazed straight in front of her, her pretty childish face conscious but curiously reluctant.

Clifford, still with his amused tolerant smile, soon got up and left them. Later, when it was time for Jimmy and Victor to get down, Victor's reluctance to go where he could no longer see the girl, made him feel to himself like a weight that he could hardly move. For a few moments it was quite clear to him that if he never saw her again life would be a long torture.

It had grown dark when they approached their home. In one of the newly built houses the curtains had been put up and a light shone through them on the ground floor. This was the first sign of anyone's having actually come into residence. So the first inhabitant had arrived, and the light looked incredibly intimate and domestic and close, where there used to be only darkness lying far round their home.

Victor walked briskly by Jimmy's side. He felt something was happening within him, like an assault, the dreadful beginning of his remorse, because of the feelings he had just indulged. Why must this devastation always come upon him? Other people got off more lightly than that.

How he clung to the idea of Jimmy's presence now!

After supper they went into the library. They could spend hours taking out one book after another, reading a few pages, not speaking much, sometimes handing over a book and knowing, without anything said, what it was handed for—both far more content than if they had been alone. And later, when their mother had gone to bed, before they stopped their reading, they would be sure to sit down close together at the table and read something aloud, as they had done ever since they first spelled out the easiest words. It was something for which they needed each other, and Victor had a deep concealed pride because Jimmy

needed him for this and would not have been satisfied with any substitute for him. And to-night Victor felt a special stealthy satisfaction. He was so nearly being tortured by his exaggerated sense of guilt, but while he had Jimmy there beside him it was like being in safety.

They stayed up very late. The lights in the newly inhabited house had long gone out when Jimmy and Victor still sat close to the lamp in the big shadowed room, while Victor in his indeterminate voice put apposite questions to Jimmy.

"*What inconveniences arise from the want of m-m-m-method?*" asked Victor, with the helpless innocent look that always came to him for a moment when a word was difficult.

And Jimmy gave the answer in his indifferent easy manner, continuing to smoke.

"*Without it,*" he said, "*confusion, darkness, and mistake will unavoidably attend our thoughts and discourses.*"

In all that they read Victor as usual had the inferior part, and to-night he had no resentment and was even pleased that his part accorded with the dependent, treasured sense he had of Jimmy's presence.

"*By a few modest questions,*" read Jimmy finally, "*they will much better discover their ignorance, than by a direct opposition, which often raises the passions, and shuts a door against conviction.*"

And Victor listened and felt a kind of worship of Jimmy.

iii

The next afternoon Clifford came again to the house. Mrs. Carmichael met him in the hall.

"There!" she exclaimed with real dismay. "Jimmy's gone out. He's only been gone about half an hour."

"Oh well, never mind, Mrs. Carmichael," said

Clifford easily. His attractive manner always made her want to please him.

"What a pity!" she said. "All this way!" She felt she had absolutely nothing to offer as a substitute to anyone who wanted Jimmy. But he stood there unperturbed in his ruddy health and strength and good-humour.

"What about Victor?" he asked. "Is he about?"

She opened the library door, and there was Victor. The two went out, and it was the first time they had chosen to go out together. From that day it was understood that Victor would do for Clifford if Jimmy was not available. It was never put more strongly than that, but even that was strange enough to the mother's mind, who had treasured the idea of Clifford's friendship for Jimmy.

But soon Clifford was obliged to go home to Bristol, to turn his attention to business.

CHAPTER V

i

THE new road was called Park Lane, and in the course of the next few weeks the Carmichaels had plenty of neighbours at their very doors. The life of the road stopped short at them; it did not tend to come past them into Dacre Lane—it all tended back in the other direction towards the electric trams and shops whence it had come; but the Carmichaels' house was, as it were, drawn into the new road. They could, if they had liked, have been No. 47 Park Lane, on the odd number side, or almost equally they could have been No. 48 on the even number side, for Park Lane bungled them indeterminately, lapsing impartially on one side into a muddy foot-track round into Dacre Lane, and on the other into a deceitfully alluring vista of Scrutton Grounds.

Mrs. Carmichael adapted herself to neighbourliness not at all at first. She was so accustomed to her self-containedness. She kept only one maid and had her time greatly occupied in the large house. She had both her sons at home, both idle, temporizing in regard to what they should do. With her curious habit of privacy, even from them she detached herself in order to prosecute her restless schemes and improvements. Vaguely, everything she did was done for Jimmy, and yet though she did it all for him, and continued to do it, she could not be unaware of his disapproval. When she newly furnished the sitting-room she did it for him. Yes, she had to do these things for him, otherwise the hungry need to serve

him would sometimes have been starved. And then when it was done she dreaded his coming in and noticing, and his silence, and his uneasy look. He hated these changes, and soon his obstinate will bore her down, and she left things the same for him.

And as that Autumn and Winter came on she was drawn more into neighbourly life and even, through that, more into touch with her sons. At No. 14 Park Lane Mr. and Mrs. Fokes were not long in residence before a bond of friendship was made between the two families, and Mrs. Fokes was often at the Carmichaels', speeding cheerfully in, with only just that amount of apology which made her give quickly her bright resourceful reason why she had come.

". . . just to return this fascinating volume," she would say, beginning to speak before she got well in, so that they lost the first words, " and to know what you *really* think of it. . . ."

She was small, past thirty, attractive to look at, of such energy in all directions that other people had to hurry to keep up with her. At the Carmichaels', she drew the mother and sons into more intercourse with each other, because they now had in her for the first time a friend who was common to them all. When she came, it was for any of them; and she seemed equally happy if she brought sewing to do with Mrs. Carmichael, or if she came into the library and wandered round, touching reverently, exclaiming, in a way that they liked.

She was almost breathless at the spectacle of the books. Culture was her chief ultimate activity. For years, wherever she had been, she had stood for literary culture among her friends—she had battened on her reputation, enjoying it, and a quotation from Tennyson had been enough to keep it alive, and a quotation from Browning had been enough to send it whirring abroad. Now when she found this library and in it the two young men, quiet, belonging there, she felt deeply interested

and awed. Pictorially, it was her ideal of culture. She sometimes stood for a moment when she came in at the library door, stood quite still, demonstratively taking an impression of the scene, the rich walls of books, vaguely brown, the brown carpet, the two young men in their brown suits, all the different browns harmonizing warmly, the palest being the large, pale greeny-brown globe in its stand in a corner of the room. She stood with her head a little on one side, and they had to wait while she perceptibly took her impression. It reminded her of pictures, of Orchardsons.

Soon the Carmichaels' chief interests were centred round Mrs. Fokes. Within three months of her arrival she had set on foot the South Mimms Literary Circle which, when two elderly sisters living at some distance joined it, became more largely the South Mimms and Finchley Literary Circle. They met in drawing-rooms; they had readings and discussions. Soon they had a little paper which appeared once a month, economically printed by a gelatine process which produced a blurred but just decipherable result. When the Circle could boast twenty members it rented a couple of rooms, and held its meetings and edited its paper there. The rooms had an ineradicable mustiness, and wall-papers which everyone repeatedly said did not really matter, and precarious wooden floors yielding dust. There were weekly meetings.

But oftener than that Mrs. Fokes and Victor and Jimmy were in consultation together on matters affecting the Circle. Mrs. Fokes was the leading spirit of it, the initiator and chief energy. But the young men had a position of peculiar importance. The Society, following Mrs. Fokes's lead, had surrounded them with the glamour and romance of learning. They were the real thing. Members were admitted to the library, and exclaimed and whispered, and Jimmy and Victor lived in an atmosphere of respectful admiration.

To Mrs. Fokes and the Circle Jimmy gave only his indifferent attention, often ridiculing the whole thing. But Victor gave far more than that. It seemed to him that this society might be the long-looked-for and passionately expected medium for him to show what was in him, and that Mrs. Fokes was the woman who understood and was leading him to his own fulfilment.

She asked his advice as to what she should read next, and he lent her books. Once when she had to compose for their journal an account of the aims and progress of the society, she came worried and appealing to the Carmichaels' house, into the library, where she found Victor alone, and solicited his help. He spent the rest of the day in deep, excited labour, and took her the result in the evening. It was a poor sentimental piece of work, but none of them knew that—Victor knew it least of all then. It was the best he could do at that stage of his development, which was certainly at least as advanced as that of anyone else in the Circle. Years after he came on his rough draft of it again and wondered.

But now he had the glow of his achievement. As he walked quickly and importantly down to her house in the moonlight, carrying the manuscript, only one doubt worried at his satisfaction. If, instead, she had found Jimmy in the library, would she have appealed to him, or had she come determined that it must be Victor? He needed to feel sure of this last, to know that she recognized that he was cleverer than Jimmy. And he did convince himself that when she found him alone Fortune had merely favoured her firm resolution.

He was shown into the fresh little sitting-room, painfully bright with the solitary incandescent light. Mr. Fokes, lately returned from the city, was reading the *Times*, a pleasure which he always strictly reserved for his evening leisure. He spent his days trying not

to hear the news, irritably discouraging his fellow clerks from commenting to him on public events. When Victor came in, with his pale face, and his eyes blinking in the light, Mr. Fokes was delighted. He went outside and called:

"Minnie! We've got a visitor! . . . No, you come and see for yourself."

He set two decanters and glasses on the table.

"Can I tempt you?" he asked.

"Not any, thank you. Well, if I m-m-must, a little whisky, very weak, very weak indeed," said Victor nervously.

Mrs. Fokes came running down. Victor felt almost afraid for her to see him. When a person has an open mind of expectancy almost anyone must fall short of the vague glamour of the unknown, and he was sensitive and vulnerable, and feared that he would see her face fall.

But all she showed was a deepening of her brightness.

"You don't mean to say you've finished it! You're too wonderful. Edward, he's been doing that article for me that I was worrying myself to death over last night. And I'm sure he's done it simply perfectly. Oh please give it to me at once."

He passed her the manuscript which was written in his good clear writing. He felt no misgiving about the article: he felt it was fine. In the excitement of this moment he could not remember any one thing in it that stood out, but he just had a vague impression that the thing was fine.

Mrs. Fokes began to read rapidly, her expression bright with interest, her head as well as her eyes moving slightly from one line to another, and from time to time she read some words aloud in her enthusiasm. Victor watched her, fascinated, thrilling warmly with satisfaction, and it was excruciatingly difficult to attend to Mr. Fokes, who was by way of being talkative over their glasses.

"Have you heard any talk of a new railway station?" inquired Mr. Fokes.

"No," said Victor difficultly.

"Not come your way? Well, the rumour's going round for what it's worth. Let those that talk show me the site first, and then I'll believe it. Are you aware that the nearest piece of purchasable land is that bit down by the——"

Mrs. Fokes's voice broke suavely in.

"—we who more than anything are interested in Literature and Life," she read in parenthesis admiringly and went quickly and silently on.

"Is anybody going to say that's a suitable site for a railway station?" Mr. Fokes gave a short laugh. "I don't fancy many men, not of my acquaintance, enjoy walking half a mile away from the direction they're wanting to get to. It goes against human nature. In my experience a man would rather walk——"

But before he had finished Victor turned eagerly from him to Mrs. Fokes, hearing her voice.

"—the beauties of Nature—woodland, hill and sea," she murmured.

The words moved Victor deeply as she said them.

ii

One evening Victor went out and stood at the corner where the tram terminus and a few brilliantly lighted shops drew the people thicker than in any other part. But the shops had rather the appearance of shops at the seaside in the off-season: they were bright and prepared and empty, as yet living on hopes. What heightened the impression of a seaside town was that a loud, clean wind was hurrying by, making the shop-lamps flare unevenly, and a few remote stars seemed to tremble.

Victor strolled about, smartly dressed. He wore

a pair of brown spats and carried a new yellow cane, and he had a jaunty air. In his young face there was a look of something noble, undiscovered or undeveloped, violated now by a mean little look of unworthy impulse.

He waited, strolling about, looking at the people, until at last he saw a girl coming slowly along the pavement. His heart leapt with terror when he saw her, and at the same time he advanced towards her with bold determination.

"Good evening," he said.

The girl looked at him.

"You seem to know me," she said impishly.

"Yes, I met you once."

"And once seen never forgotten, I suppose."

"I daresay you don't remember me," said Victor.

"Well, I do and I don't. Half a minute, doesn't your friend know Florrie Adams?"

"Yes."

"That's right," she said interestedly, "and I was out with her one day when we met the two of you. I hope your friend's very well?"

"He's gone away. He lives at B-b-b-bristol."

"I say, you do stutter," she said in a calm, friendly way. "What's the reason of that?"

"I don't know," said Victor with a little laugh, because the easiest, pleasantest way was for it to be an agreeable joke.

"B-b-bristol," she mimicked. "Oh, Lord, I can't do it as well as you do," and they both laughed enjoyably.

He found that her face was as pretty as he had remembered it. All his terror was gone now, and his sense of bold mastery was increasing. He saw her become self-conscious before him. He felt something like a great laugh in him because it was easy to use his power.

"Do you want to go for a walk?" he asked.

"All right. I have to be in by ten," she said, a little passion of resentment coming into her eyes.

"That's because you might get into mischief, you know," he said with a foolish smile.

"That's my look-out, not theirs. Keeping a girl cooped up. Well, they shan't do it much longer."

"It's only eight now," he said.

He never said long sentences for fear of pitfalls in them, but he had acquired a curious power of conveying in his bearing more than he said. Now he made the night seem full and long before them.

They walked away from the streets into the quiet roads. All the time she would talk, and her talk vaguely troubled him. He had a wave of shame because her voice was common.

"It's so deadly over here," she confided in him, for she had many passionate grievances. "Of course at my home where I live it's quite as far out as this only it's not nearly so quiet. And even when I get an afternoon I can't always manage to get over there, though it's not above four miles away. It's what I call a cross-country journey, if you can understand what I mean by the term."

"Haven't you got a bicycle?"

"That's where it is, you see," she complained. "If I had, of course I could get over there in no time. Isn't it a wretched shame not having one! I do wish I had."

Victor held the restless, beautiful girl by the arm. Her beauty was marked with her passionate discontent. In a few years there would be nothing but resentment in her eyes.

They told their names. She was Rose Smith.

"I say, are you fond of the name of Jack?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I've got a friend of mine by that name."

"I suppose you've a lot of friends," he said jealously.

He watched her rich, beautiful profile while she smiled. He knew in his heart that this girl was nothing but a momentary incident in his life, in no manner connected with all that life held for him, and yet he had taken a very vivid impression of her. She would in her time be far more to other people than she was to him, and yet not one would more thoroughly as it were sort out her beauty than he did, with an eye that was perfectly expert. And this seemed to give him a right to her. He took her hand. His very touch told him it was not a beautiful hand, but in his passion there was room for that. He let her talk on.

All the evening some little remembrance of Mrs. Fokes just came into his mind and vanished. And as he and Rose Smith turned to go back, and he thought he would kiss her now when they turned, he had a sudden, sharp thought of Mrs. Fokes, and of how she seemed to recognize him and understand him. It was only a few nights ago that he had felt that wonderful mingling of joy and pride when she read aloud what he had written, and he longed now to live up to the best expectations of his life, not to sink to the depth of Rose's appeal. He felt a strange necessity to be faithful to Mrs. Fokes's admiration. She was so far the one link between an indifferent world and his own belief in himself. He felt the necessity even for a bodily faithfulness to Mrs. Fokes; everything was due to her.

He walked on abstracted beside the girl, not dealing with her now but dealing with the great hope inside him. She talked to him. All the time they came nearer and nearer to people and lights.

"Good-bye, Rose," he said when they reached the tram terminus.

"Good-bye," she said half-indifferently, but as she turned away he thought he saw her quick, smouldering fire of resentment rise up in her against him. As he

turned on his own way he faltered for a moment in wild, angry disappointment, and then went on, and soon passed by Mrs. Fokes's door. There was a crack of light at the edge of the thick drawing-room curtains, and towards those little lines of light Victor sent from his heart a pledge of fidelity to the greatest things in himself.

iii

A letter from the Literary Society came for Jimmy, and they discussed it. Mrs. Carmichael had brought it to him in the library, and she stayed, sitting by rather stiffly. She sat so little in the library that it was almost as if she were a visitor.

"Does Mrs. Fokes write it?" she asked.

"No, mother." On Jimmy's face there was something pleased but half-mocking. "You are forgetting the functions of Miss Firbank. Miss Firbank, as the secretary, writes it, very properly. I was at Launceston Road yesterday; I think she must have been writing to me while I was there. She says on any subject I like. They give me a nice wide field, you see. That's to say, they give me the trouble of choosing."

"Yes," said his mother with ready partisanship. "That sounds very kind—we'll allow you to have your choice, and all that. Of course it's just that they can't think of anything themselves."

Victor sat quiet and tense. "Is it possible," he was thinking, "that they have asked him to do this, and I am left out?" Just now at first it seemed terrible to him. He knew the Society meant so little to Jimmy compared to what it meant to him; yet here was Jimmy called in to read aloud at an important meeting, while Victor, giving himself to it altogether, was ignored. He thought Miss Firbank must have written the wrong name by mistake, or had Jimmy misread it? He longed to look at the envelope lying on the table, feeling absolutely convinced that his

name was really on it, but he did not like to do so until he could be unobserved. But suddenly, glancing at Jimmy's face, it struck him how bright and handsome and placid it looked, and all at once he no longer wanted to look at the envelope.

But what at first exasperated him to his very soul, in a few days became a pleasure and an excitement. Jimmy was invited to read aloud from some author, with introductory remarks and comments of his own. This was to be done at one of the monthly meetings which had lately been established, when members were allowed to bring their friends. Jimmy agreed to do it, and Victor began to cast about to decide on an author for him, and when one had been chosen Victor began to read hard, and to mark passages, and make notes of eager obvious criticism, for which Jimmy, not troubling about the whole thing, counted on him.

It became a matter of pride and gratification to Victor that Jimmy should be doing this. Out at tea one day he met someone who as a member's friend was to be present at the reading.

"I hear we're to have a most interesting paper by some young man," she said. "Everyone seems to think it will be very brilliant."

"Well, you see, he happens to be my b-b-brother," said Victor with his proud, shy, innocent look, and as with that look he smiled at her there was beauty in his face.

On the afternoon itself everything went well. In the outer room there was tea. Inside, Victor sat on a small wooden chair, wedged closely in, his knees pressed uncomfortably against a shabby little piano that went flat across in front of him. Over the piano someone had thrown a large piece of green silk, embroidered with the letters S M F L C. Again and again while he waited he checked the gold-thread letters to see that they were right. His mother sat by Mrs. Fokes

in the middle. Miss Firbank, who knew shorthand, was conspicuously in front. The people sat all looking at Jimmy.

Victor was jealous that Jimmy should be so out of touch with him, nothing to show that he was his brother. Straining, he took at the beginning a long, slightly shamed look at Jimmy's face—shamed because there was an unwonted tight, pale look round his mouth, which it was cruel yet fascinating to watch. After that, Victor did not look at him but at the people, interested, attentive, and he felt jealous that Jimmy belonged to all of them. But at the end of the paper, which Jimmy read correctly in his rather colourless voice, Victor saw his brother's eyes searching round until at last they fell on him where he craned at the side, and then they were satisfied. And Victor knew it was Jimmy's habit to need him.

At the end Victor stayed behind with Mrs. Fokes and Miss Firbank. Prompted by Mrs. Fokes, he had gradually come to take a large part in the work of conducting the Society and its journal. He did everything slowly but with an exaggerated triumph of achievement. And she was used to having him there; her first enthusiasm for the Society having waned, she was a little bored by the work unless it brought Victor, with his almost fierce interest in it, to her side.

They put out the gas in one room and sat in the other. The dust raised off the wooden floor by the crowd of outgoing feet settled downwards out of the air. Mrs. Fokes had on a pink satin blouse, and Victor dreaded that she would rest her arms on some surface and get it dirty. Miss Firbank put on her spectacles and sat down. She began to write, but she needed help. "With masterly condensation Mr. Carmichael traced—" She paused and pushed the paper a little way along the table towards Mrs. Fokes. They sat together and both struggled with it. Victor

walked up and down behind them, while they kept appealing to him. He advised hesitatingly, and each time he remained absorbed for a little while in his satisfaction with what he said, until a new appeal interrupted him. Sometimes he went and overlooked the paper they wrote on, by an unconscious instinct never bending over the thin dark figure of Miss Firbank, but on the side where Mrs. Fokes, small and stout and childlike, sat in her bright blouse.

"Many interesting points were raised," wrote Miss Firbank in conclusion. But Victor, not satisfied, began to dictate, slowly finding his words:

"—were raised—in the course of a keen and searching but always symp-p-pathetic analysis." He came to see how it looked as Miss Firbank wrote eagerly. He felt a kind of pure, upright pride, and Mrs. Fokes raised her smiling, admiring face to him where he stood beside her. He bent over until he touched the pale pink blouse. She trembled and shrank away. In the little dusty room with the report lying finished on the table, and the little bright woman trembling before him, he felt almost unbearably his own potency.

CHAPTER VI

i

ALL this time Jimmy's placid days were filled with the purpose of finding some employment to which he would be satisfied and interested to give his life. He would not venture lightly into anything that offered itself. He had plain solid instincts which saved him all trouble of thinking, which would prevent him from going laxly into something in which dissatisfactions would crop up. So he waited, but always there was visible in him his placid normal purpose, and he went about looking and listening, and he gave strongly the impression that he was on the brink of success: it was impossible to doubt that.

His mother felt it, and was confident and patient, and there was the bond of perfect understanding between them. While circumstances continued to withhold from Jimmy the opportunity to form his career, there was not in his mother a hint of that uneasiness which would have worried him intensely. When one year, and another, and still another, went by to test her faith and it was just as alive and untroubled as at the beginning, she stood solidly in his life for ease and peace. She lived for him and understood him. She was expert in removing trouble out of his way, especially in removing emotion, which he hated. Or when any emotion came and thrust itself on him she suffered with him in his brooding puzzled uneasiness.

It was Victor who was the thorn in their flesh, disturbing their peace, so that the mother and the

younger son made a kind of side against him, to endure him. They were helpless under his assaults of temper, and still more helpless under his violent attacks of remorse, until he sometimes made the home dark with his passions and his suffering, and only between the mother and Jimmy went a thin silent thought of peace.

Victor too was idle in the matter of wage-earning, though for some months his interest in the affairs of the literary society put a gloss of industry on his life. He would go off with unpunctual alacrity to meet Mrs. Fokes or Miss Firbank at the offices at Launceston Road, and importance was lent to these activities by the optimistic rumour that with the inevitable growth of the society the paper would enlarge its circulation until it could support a paid staff. What Victor's position would be in such a case was not named, but it was generally understood that he would be in competition with Miss Firbank for the post of highest honour.

Jimmy spent the years between leaving school and beginning to work in keeping a quiet persistent outlook, playing tennis in summer and hockey in winter, growing more solid and handsome. With him, youth did not mean that the passing days were a wonderful unfolding and revelation—he had already determined how he wanted life to appear to him, and his effort now and always was to fit it into shape. And hardest of all was it to fit Victor in.

And Victor sometimes felt mad with all the beauty there was in life, and his inability to get into relation with it. He felt devastated by his power to worship beauty in nature and love and art, and yet he never seemed to be able to approach, to get a response for himself. Lying on his back looking far up into green trees, swaying in their height, he would long to feel that his praise was accepted somewhere, somehow. Instead, a cold message seemed to come to him that

if he died they would still go on the same. And he had to force the incredible realisation of this upon himself, because it was true.

ii

Coming in one day he hung up his waterproof and turned down his trousers and felt the quiet and comfort of being in out of the tremendous shower. The hall was dark with the rain outside. He had been alone at Launceston Road all the morning, and now he came home with the eager need he often felt for his mother and Jimmy.

His good-humour died out of him when he heard that they had gone into London. He always liked excursions with them, and there could not have been a plan he would more gladly have fallen in with, especially to-day. Last night he had been away from them on his own pleasures, and always after that the reactionary need to be with them was imperative. Now as long as they were absent he would feel as it were shut off from absolution. As he ate his lunch alone, and saw the May sky clear itself for a bright blue space for the sun to pass into, his only interest was in reckoning how soon they might be home. For hours the sun passed in and out, and whenever it came out it was with that special burning intensity which it sometimes seems to gather behind clouds. Victor remained gloomily waiting. He had a vivid recollection of one particular expedition in childhood when the three of them had gone together into town. He remembered himself, not actually small in body, because one cannot remember being small, but he could remember how enormous his mother was. He remembered the pang of unutterable fear with which he had realized on a crowded pavement that the lower half of a black skirt which for the last minute he had been zealously following, was not the lower half of his mother's skirt, but someone else's—someone whose

upper part when he looked at it in terrified discovery appeared to him the most horrible thing in the world because it was not his mother's upper part. He had found her almost immediately, but for a moment he had been alone in an awful world. Other memories of those expeditions came as he sat waiting, and in his present mood he suffered under them, because those were times when he depended only on her. He thought of Rose Smith and of other girls of her kind with vehement dislike.

As it was growing dark he began to feel unwell with one of his headaches. He was intensely nervous about his health, and now when he felt his hands cold and numb, felt his heart fluttering, and pain creeping dully into the front of his head, he sat stricken still, fearing death itself, his face white, and his dark blue eyes full of pain and watching. An hour the pain in his head took to heap itself to a crisis, and an hour to undo itself from its cruel complications and subside. The maid came in to clear away his tea, which he had not touched; he spoke to her to keep her in the room.

Pain always brought him a sense of acute guilt, and now that he was getting better he longed for the distraction of intercourse. More and more baffled he grew as the hours went by and the others stayed away. He grew so set upon their coming that he would not go upstairs to change his shoes in case he might miss the earliest sound of them.

He longed for them, but when they came he felt only exceedingly irritated. They did not take much notice of him; they were both tired, but their tiredness in their homecoming was pleasant to them, part of their day.

They sat down to wait for supper.

"You have been a time," said Victor.

"You can't really do two in a day, not to your satisfaction," said Mrs. Carmichael in a complacent, exhausted voice as she rested in an armchair.

"Two what," said Victor with grudging interrogativeness. He was alert with resentment to know what they had done.

"Why, picture galleries. The mind comes away quite confused. Jimmy, what was that one in the Tate I liked so much—don't let me forget?"

They spoke quietly and comfortably in the soft lamplight, waiting for the meal to come. They were so complete, something was rising in Victor against them.

"You might have spared yourselves looking at that," he said; "it's rotten."

"Oh, no, it's quite good," said Jimmy indifferently.

"Is it? Ask anyone—" Victor's blustering manner always seemed to hang suspended for want of more words.

"Oh, yes, it's good enough," said Jimmy.

"You'd be laughed at, by anyone who knows," said Victor, smiling himself.

"Would I?" said Jimmy. "Very pleased to provide anyone with some mild amusement."

"I'm damned if I would be. I'd rather people laughed at something else than at my stu-stu-stupidity."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said Jimmy, shifting his position in his chair as if to end it. "I don't think I need worry much about this purely imaginary laughter. Mother, what's the time?" he asked uneasily.

"I don't pretend to know all about pictures—though I jolly well will one day," said Victor. "But I know you're wrong and I'm right about that p-p-picture." They had to watch him while his face worked slightly, with its extraordinary innocent, helpless, look. "Can you take in the meaning of that?"

"All right. You're right about that and everything else too, if you like."

"But you don't believe it. My God, if I could make you know——"

"What does a picture matter?" said Jimmy with a simple reasonable appeal. He loathed the emotion.

"Oh, damn you, what does anything matter!"

Jimmy kindled a little with reluctant anger.

"You'd better not talk like that!" he said, and then immediately wished that he had not allowed himself so much feeling.

"Do you think—do you think you're going to tell me what *words* I can say?" Victor asked incredulously, with a laugh which was painful in its utter irrelation to any humour.

Jimmy looked with contempt at the spectacle of ludicrous ineffectual scorn.

"They aren't very many if you come to that."

But immediately he felt uneasy. No triumph, no pride of anger did he want, he wanted nothing but to be undisturbed. He dreaded Victor's drawing him in.

"Because I'd rather be ordered about by a c-c——" They waited unwillingly, and yet there was never anything to do but wait in these pauses. "By a convict than by you. Yes."

"I'm not ordering you about," said Jimmy. "Why don't you let me alone?"

"Why don't I! I'm sure I don't know. I'm different from you." He tried to express his positive conviction. "I tell you what, you think you're far above me, but it may interest you to know that I wouldn't change with you, not for——"

Jimmy had placed one hand on the arm of his chair, preparatory to raising himself up. At the same time his eye wandered to where his hat lay on a chair. Victor's expression changed and his words died away; his eyes began to watch. His dark blue eyes could look piteous in their depths; they became charged with appeal against an inexorable fate. As usual, he felt his anger vanishing into thin air, leaving instead within him emptiness for fear to leap into. He

blustered a little in his movement back to where he had stood before.

And Jimmy got up slowly, almost indifferently, and reached for his hat and went away.

The supper came in just when he had gone. The mother looked weary indeed now. They ate without speaking. At the end, she did not know how to bear the misery she felt in him. He sat back in the shadow, idle, alert, and she felt he watched every movement of hers.

"Is your head bad?" she said.

"Not now; it was bad."

"I guessed as much." She did her best to understand him.

"He went out, didn't he?" Victor asked.

"Yes, he went out."

"What about his supper?" From old habit Victor could still have imagined Jimmy hiding in some dark place on Scrutton Grounds.

"I daresay he'll get some supper somewhere," said Mrs. Carmichael.

And Victor remembered, that he would.

"Yes, he will," he said.

"Victor," she said, suffering, "must it for ever be like this?"

"No, no, mother," he said in terrible grief, but the hand which went out to cling to hers, at the same time almost pushed her away, not knowing which it wanted to do, and he felt mad with irritation.

"I'll go out for a bit," he said. He knew it would be fully some hours before Jimmy came back; he would come back only to go to bed. He could not sit still waiting for so long, and he went out. His mother was glad to see him go.

iii

He might have gone to Mrs. Fokes, but she was away. He did not want to go down to the bright streets, for fear of meeting Rose Smith or some other girl he knew. He went in the dark and damp along Dacre Lane. It was very black; the sky was only an extension of dark atmosphere, none of its signs showing.

He lit the gas at Launceston Road and sorted out some papers and began to work. Interest in the Society was somehow far less keen since a fine warm spring had begun, and many little jobs which had been eagerly competed for in the Society's earlier days were now left undisputedly to him.

He found a piece of foolscap paper on which was written in Miss Firbank's small pointed writing.

I. *Mrs. Binns has kindly presented the Society with a handsome brocade cushion cover, for use at the Launceston Road rooms, where it will be much appreciated.*"

Victor wrote " II " and paused, slouching over the table, thinking difficultly. What he had to do vaguely comforted him, for it was concerned with Jimmy. Jimmy had read another paper before the Society, and there had been a mistake in the report of it.

" *By a printer's error,*" wrote Victor at length, " *which substituted 'ten' for 'the,' in the account in our last issue of the meeting on the 3rd inst., it was made to appear that only ten people were present to hear Mr. James Carmichael's reading. As a matter of fact, the invitation having been extended to friends of the members of the Society, a large number availed themselves of the opportunity, and at the most modest computation there were at least thirty people present.*"

He wrote it with labour, and leant back, pleased. He had no power of criticism of anything he did himself, only the glow and pride of achievement. Every day criticism increased in him, sharp and discerning,

with swift development; of books and pictures and things in Nature he was learning to make quick certain judgments; it was a sure power, growing in him. But in regard to anything he did himself he was simply proud and pleased. With all his soul he longed to get into touch with beauty, and so anything creative that he did he easily mistook for a step towards that.

He was pleased to write this correction. He remembered how Jimmy, reading the original paragraph, had pointed out the mistake, enjoying that it was ridiculous. But Victor was vexed for him, and had determined to put it right. Now the rounded sentences seemed extraordinarily effective.

He continued to make his little editorial notes, and with everything that he did, some misery of remorse that was crying out in him was appeased. When he looked at his watch and saw that it was half-past nine, he was glad that the hated time had gone so quickly. Still, Jimmy would not be home yet.

He took up a long letter which Mrs. Fokes had written from Edinburgh expressly for publication in the magazine. Good editing demanded an appropriate line of introduction. He thought again, and wrote:

"*Mrs. Fokes sends us from Scotia's sunny capital a cheery account of her Easter holiday there.*"

He then added the letter to the batch of copy awaiting the young girl who would come in the morning and write it out in gelatine. He put on his hat, then turned out the gas, and walked through the two dark rooms, touching something here and there to guide him. Downstairs he banged the door, which made a thin unconvincing sound, and when he pushed it to see if it were closed it rattled loosely in its latch.

At home he waited in the library until at half-past eleven Jimmy came in. There was perfect placidity between them.

CHAPTER VII

i

WHEN after a long time Jimmy got his work his mother hardly felt that anything new had happened, so secure she had been all through the delay. Indeed it was only on the day he got his work that it began to occur to anyone how long he had had to wait for it. His obstinate purpose had been the only conspicuous thing.

"I've found my billet, mother," he said one day.

"You have, dear."

"Well, don't you wonder what it is?" he asked, smiling at her in his slow, handsome way.

"Yes, I should think I do wonder."

"Well, what do you think?"

"I don't know. But nothing will surprise me," she added, on her guard. That was one way in which she reckoned never to fall behind out of touch with her sons—by never being surprised at anything. When sometimes she looked ahead to future years, seeing herself old, fearing gradual alienation from her sons in her different generation, she consoled herself with the idea that age and youth need not really be separate provided that age was careful never to show surprise. If Jimmy had announced that he was going to be a foreign missionary, to cater for the spiritual needs of Honolulu, she would still have tried to carry out her principle of preserving a perfectly unastonished demeanour.

"Well, what is it?" Victor asked quickly. He felt curiously unsafe about it. He had in a way a

certain scorn for Jimmy's mind because it was not profound, and yet he felt fatally that Jimmy was likely, by a kind of luck, to hit on the most desirable thing to do, more likely than his mind really warranted, —while Victor himself the best things still passed by. He waited in suspense to know.

"I'm going into a publishing office," said Jimmy. "I begin next week."

Victor felt a pang of envy.

Jimmy told them the details of the arrangement. In the next week he had begun work and was taking his daily journeys to the office. He was an invoice clerk at eighty-five pounds a year. During the past year he had refused two offers that had carried larger salaries than that. Something in him—no one quite understood what—that had rejected other openings was now satisfied for him to go into this office to write invoices and labels from nine-thirty to six. Something in him was content; almost without thinking he felt he was in a right channel, not a wrong one.

To his mother the day seemed to stop when he left in the morning and to begin again when he walked in at the same time every evening. Breakfast was made a larger meal, because of the light lunch he had, and his hand on the door in the evening was the sign for the supper to be hurried abundantly on to the table, a final poke to be given to the fire, or in the spring for someone to draw down the blinds now, for the lingering daylight outside no longer held anything after Jimmy's step was heard in the hall. Each night was the same, the closing of the door, the running lightly upstairs, the sound of the tap flowing in the bathroom. And the whole house seemed to cease to wait, and to become fulfilled.

The routine seemed long in itself, day by day, and yet somehow it shortened life by its changelessness. The weeks and the seasons went by, and at home the little questions arising to-day were exactly those of

last month, and last month was far away or else it was yesterday, it was all the same. In June Mrs. Carmichael used to wonder if Jimmy had caught his train, and in October she wondered about it still.

All the time, Victor's delay to work had been a more irregular thing than Jimmy's, of worse portent, though until Jimmy was actually working no remark could very well be passed upon the difference. Victor was now twenty-four years old. He had, like Jimmy, two hundred pounds a year of his own since he was twenty-one, which made idleness seem doubly dangerous because it was feasible. Every now and then he made half-abortive attempts to get something to do, fired with an ambition which yet was not solid enough to bring him to the point. At home he stated in exaggerated terms his reasons against one thing and another, trying to make up by his own emphasis for their want of agreement. His mother argued fitfully, and Jimmy withdrew himself from listening. All the time, Victor proclaimed that like Jimmy he must wait for the right thing; but in regard to him it was sometimes difficult to feel that he would know it when he found it, or that it necessarily existed at all.

And one summer the collapse of the Society, which had been threatening for some time, became complete. Victor was faithful to the last, clinging to it in a kind of unconscious belief that it held possibilities for him. But people fell away. One warm bright day in June when he turned up unpunctual as usual, but eager, for a meeting in the Launceston Road rooms he found only Miss Firbank there. The Society's programme for the afternoon was a general discussion on a literary subject, and Miss Firbank and Victor confronted one another with some awkwardness; because two people do make up the necessary numbers for a discussion: there was no getting away from that undeniable fact. But as Miss Firbank, overcoming her embarrassment, determinedly unpinned her hat, and Victor was obliged

to sit down opposite to her, his heart sank with a sense of the boredom and futility of the proceeding. The golden sun outside was an exquisite alluring distraction, and it needed a violent effort to attend to Miss Firbank, whose thin lips hardly parted when she spoke, and whose sudden intense question to him about Browning's style seemed to daze his mind with its unreality and irrelevance. It was so difficult not to attend to the afternoon beyond the open window, so necessary not to, that it was impossible to look at Miss Firbank naturally—the effort needed to look at her at all was so great that it produced in Victor a hard unnatural stare, disconcerting to a lady bent on a purely impersonal investigation into literary problems. When Victor at length got out into the sun, he walked far away through fields and lanes, and was conscious of a glorious freedom, and knew that the Society held nothing for him, and Nature everything. Yes, it was not through literary erudition but through Nature that he would develop his soul, and establish himself on the inside of all that was as yet closed. Next week he walked again far into the country, and only gave a stray thought to Miss Firbank being literary alone.

In a wood he found some bluebells and pink campion, and he picked a bunch. He had a very tender and competent way with flowers. Going home, he stopped at Mrs. Fokes's door and gave the flowers to the maid. As he asked after Mrs. Fokes he had one of his worst disabilities to pronounce a word.

"Is she going on w-w-w-well?"

And while he struggled with it he looked innocent and wistful like a child, and she waited, gazing at him, sharing his struggle, helping him with her eyes and with her will.

"This morning at half-past eleven," she said when he had finished; "a little girl——"

"Oh yes, yes," he said. He thought she should not be troubled with his flowers, but could not embark

on saying so when his tongue was so unsafe. He walked on.

For some months he had felt an extraordinary separation from her, and now this was the climax, and he thought of her as a wonderful mysterious stranger, eluding even his imagination.

So not in her either did any chance of his fulfilment lie.

ii

One winter Jimmy joined a mixed hockey club, and after a few weeks of mixed envy and contempt Victor joined it too. He was always thinking he would find far better things to do than Jimmy, and then succumbing to envy of what Jimmy actually did. They played on Saturday afternoons when the gasworks, from which they hired the field, were deserted; but not far away above them on one side trains ran infrequently by, and along the high railway bank went the procession of pallid faces behind the glass windows, each window with a face in it, peering down at them, looking until they could look no more.

They were a set of fine athletic young men and women, and they played hard on the short winter afternoons until the grey dusk appeared in the distance and came slowly travelling through, separating one wildly moving figure from another. But on and on they played, long after time, unable to stop; and then sometimes the game was invisible, on the other side of a field of foggy twilight—a dangerous twilight which had to be watched with straining eyes, for out of it came things swiftly, a wild rush which might be stopped or might just elude you, leaving you only running futilely behind to try and retrieve, panting and straining in vain. Often when that dusk came down, and they strained to pierce it, the knowledge that the ball was somewhere there in it, as hard and round as ever, and the people, as real and solid, made

each one feel as if the dusk was something coming over only his own eyes, blinding just him from all those tangible things which were in reality as hard and bright and quick as ever, and each one would want to strip his eyes of their blind inability.

Jimmy was not a brilliant player, but he was careful and safe, a popular player to have on a side. The club was so much a pioneer in the matter of mixed hockey that they were not often able to have outside matches; they simply picked sides and played on their own ground week by week. In the scale of value, somewhere far below Jimmy came Victor, erratic, foolhardy, inadequate, sometimes furious with suppressed rage, a player smiled at with allowance and something like affection but not at all keenly competed for by a side.

And while he tore about the ground there were fine, cool players doing effective things, and he saw them, but could not change. There was a girl who ran with a splendid speed, a girl in a short tweed skirt, made to leave her strong, young legs free, who, when she was tackled, pushed a little on, and just a little farther, and then surprisingly just a little farther still, and she pushed on again, and gave a final little hit, and it was done, and the ball lay between the posts in the net. She was wonderful, delicate and strong in her body, her face beautiful and free. And how she played, with her lithe, swift, insinuating movement!

And Victor would course along the field in his wild run, his arms working almost as much as his legs, the cold air coming keen into his open mouth, coming like ice to his tongue. "I'll do it, I'll do it! Damn that great brute, I'll stop him, he shan't pass me by like that. If only I can get there, if I can last just till then, I'll stop him, he'll find he's got someone to deal with." He was running, the field seemed endless. He wished that the air, so icy cold, were

liquid too, to flow into his parched throat. He got into a scuffle of people, he hit wildly, he hit again, his face was distorted with his effort, the people vanished from around him, far down the field someone was running swiftly and lightly with the ball, away.

"Damn," he said, looking round furtively.

In two little red corrugated iron huts they changed their clothes at the end, and the girls hurried, for it was their business to get ready the tea outside. The kettle was boiling on a pail of fire, and there were buns to be cut in half and buttered. It was done quickly in the cold dusk. The butter was cut in thin hard slices and laid detachedly on the bun. A few yards off the men were scraping boots and sticks, their own and the girls', discussing the incidents of the game. Almost every stroke could be recalled and recognized, and discussed and laughed over. Soon a steaming cup was in everyone's hands, while they stood round, their bodies tingling with exercise, their faces red, and above them a few early stars coming out in the winter sky.

And Victor from a distance watched the girl who played so well, Cynthia Bradley; sometimes he hurried to be ready in case it should fall to him to scrape her boots or carry her long hockey-bag, but always he remained only on the outskirts, never penetrating to her, for she was one of a little group of friends. And Victor watched her, knowing he had confidence and daring enough to insist himself on her if he had a sufficient wish.

But it gave him a kind of pride not to insist himself, not even to look at her or speak to her. The very thought of her was a refinement. He had the knowledge lurking about him of Rose Smith and other common girls; with them he insisted himself, and now he felt a glow of satisfaction and pride because no one here knew of that, and he could associate naturally and successfully with this other kind of

girl. He was very proud of that, of giving like to like, of replying to refinement by a like refinement. With him daring was of a coarse kind, and the very thought of Cynthia was a check to anything coarse.

But Jimmy grew to know her better. On the rare occasions when they played outside matches, the chosen eleven was sure to include Jimmy, and almost sure not to include Victor. On those excursions, sometimes to a distance by train, to a strange ground, to play against strange people, the little band was drawn together to familiarity, and the girl, who was shy, could speak too then.

Often Jimmy was at her side, but not by any special effort that he made. He was entirely serene, without effort in any direction. Only behind his serenity there could be felt a fixed blind will. From the first the girl had noticed him specially. He had a manner which made every girl notice him. It was serene and friendly, yet ultimately so detached. He made use of pleasant, polite phrases which he said simply and easily. "What a pity you have to go." "You mustn't carry that, you will be tired out." "I hope we shall soon meet again."

Then when the early days of Spring came they were still playing hockey, but now in the middle of the game they lay flat on the grass, under the pale sun, their warmth moistening their bodies, bursting out into moist coolness. They rushed over the softened earth, their sticks knocking, their hard tense bodies in iron contact that they hardly felt. And then when they lay they could not speak, their breathing was hard and quick.

iii

But Cynthia Bradley was quite distinct to Jimmy from any other girl. He thought of her and felt an excitement that in this degree was new to him. He

was half in love with her, and he revelled in the quickening of his senses which the thought of her could bring. Sitting in the office he took long thoughts of her, quietly thrilling, deeply satisfied as yet with his mere thought, and not troubled with longing.

And as he sat there thinking, the three other clerks at the counter with him became blinded out of sight, his blue eyes fell away from seeing, he was only conscious of Cynthia, of her strong, slender, rounded body in her hockey things, and her beautiful guileless look. Then came the familiar sound of a step on the oilcloth passage outside, at which his attention would, as it were, be distantly prepared to be recalled, then the swing-door of the office would open and swing to, somebody coming from without to within, and Jimmy's attention would be on the very edge of readiness, while the vision of Cynthia still lingered with him; and when two or three quick steps brought the man up to the counter upon which he dropped a limp bag like a postman's, half full of books, then Jimmy's blue eyes were upon him, fully alert and ready.

And while the man felt about in his bag for his order-book Jimmy attended to him easily. He was far from being absorbedly interested, but everything that happened was in a way right, part of the rightness of his being here. This steady interruption of the collectors invariably brought him soon from Cynthia, and he could bear it well.

Always the collector took out his slip-book, which opened longways at a place marked by the fixed elastic band being slipped over some of the thumb-marked pages, and said the name of a book he wanted. While Jimmy wrote out the invoice the collector sang out a whole list of names from his book, in case any more of them could be supplied from here. Now and then Jimmy stopped him and wrote out a new invoice.

Always the man had the names a little wrong, and Jimmy, while he listened, was often puzzled and guessing.

All the time he was learning everything about the book trade, numbers and prices and names; it was a language he could now speak and understand. And in the evening he went home and sat with Victor in the library between warm walls of calf-bound books, books not bartered about, not handled or priced or misnamed.

One Sunday afternoon he went to tea at Cynthia Bradley's house at Finchley. The club was about to break up for the summer, and just at this time several of the members gave tea-parties, in an access of friendliness, reluctant to part. Cynthia's was like the others, only over it hovered her special shy grace. She laughed with a cooing sound on a long note, her eyes not looking, her body quiet; and in her indoor dress, with her hair loosely done, she was different, but still beautiful. There was nothing in her nor in her home to disillusion Jimmy in the least of any ideal he had of her. She seemed more whole, more lovable. And yet when it was time to say good-bye to her he could bear it; it was possible to do so, to leave her for all the months of the Summer, to make no effort for their meeting, satisfied with the vague prospect of the club reassembling in October, with the same people.

Still he did not think, but he knew. Instinct guided him plainly. As he knew that he was right in the choice of his business, so now he knew that he was right to let her go. He had not a single pang, it was so clear. If he had had to think of it, it might have been a thing of infinite indecision, he might have been hard put to establish to himself how she was not loved, but something inscrutable in him told him plainly, so that he was saved that. He let her go for the splendid coming Summer, and for always.

CHAPTER VIII

i

WHEN the next Autumn came, and business was stirring and energy becoming keen after a flaccid Summer, it was difficult to see Victor doing nothing. "Put your chair back against the wall," his mother would sometimes say to him in a little outburst of impatience when he got up to stroll out of the room—not because she cared about its being put back, but because she felt an almost frenzied wish to make him do something. "Put your chair back against the wall, and shut the door after you," she said, her voice sharp with impatience and command. And she made him go hither and thither for her, violating all her life-habit of liking to fetch and carry for herself. She did herself violence in sitting still and bidding him go and bring her work; she loved to do active service for herself. But her impatience with him made her do it, almost with satisfaction. And he did everything gladly, loving her.

Then one day a blow fell on her. She and Jimmy went out after supper. They had been given a young black spaniel puppy, who had immediately fastened her affections on Jimmy; he therefore became her master, and he was pleased to take her out in the evening. It was still only dusk on a melancholy Autumn evening; Scrutton Grounds looked vast and almost panoramic. Even out of its very questionable earth there had risen autumnal mist and dew—its refuse soil had yielded at least that harvest; it looked shrouded and mountainous. The two walked round,

skirting it. They talked of little things. She often wondered what had happened to Clifford Rendel, and she mentioned him now, but Jimmy knew nothing of him. All this time they had not heard from him.

Then they stepped up on to Scrutton Grounds to search for the dog who had disappeared, and as it was one way to go home they walked slowly across there, across the dreary waste, wondering if they saw the dog moving ahead.

They came to a man and woman clasped together. They felt the awkwardness of not being seen or heard, until just as they were close the man's face was lifted to them over the girl's shoulder. It was Victor's face. Mrs. Carmichael stopped. She stared at Victor, waiting, something new and tender and wondering coming on her face. She gazed at him, questioning, all her soul come into her face, come to meet this son of hers, who at this moment alone existed for her, as in the moment when he was born.

Victor and the girl stood apart.

"I c-c-came out for a bit, mother," he said.

She looked at him in astonishment, not expecting anything like that.

"And this is some one I know."

He saw her more astonished.

"This is Rose Smith I know a little—" he floundered about.

She looked in sudden scorn at him.

"I got late for supper—I——"

He fumbled about. He looked ignominious with embarrassment and deceit. Mrs. Carmichael gave him up and turned to the girl with a sharp, hopeful look, hoping for some real thing from her.

"Good evening," she said to her.

"Good evening."

"I am pleased we met you. Have you known my son long?"

The girl assumed quickly a look of resentment;

her face took on the ready familiar lines of her grievance against authority. But already there was less passion than there used to be in her resentment; she was more hard and shifty. Her artfulness was clear upon her, as clear as her prettiness.

"Only a few months or so—or thereabouts," she said deprecatingly, to make it little.

"Only a few months. And are you so sure of yourselves in that much of time?"

The girl gave a little defiant laugh which stopped doubtfully, and she was silent.

"I don't want to seem interfering," said Mrs. Carmichael. She looked very young, so young that the girl felt awkward—she was unable to class her merely as dull, foolish, interfering age which it was youth's natural business to thwart. And in Mrs. Carmichael's heart the pain of their denials grew heavy. She longed for them to flaunt and proclaim their love, however mistaken. Their shame terrified her.

"Well, I must say I am glad we had this chance meeting," she said pathetically. "Now he'll be bringing you home, so that I and his brother can get to know you."

The girl looked at Jimmy.

"If you just come round one afternoon," said Mrs. Carmichael, "we won't be at all stiff. Suppose you brought round a bit of sewing, and then we can sit over that."

The girl glanced her dismay at the young men, fancying them in league with her. She looked back suspiciously at Mrs. Carmichael, alert to defend herself against loathed tyranny and restraint. She had a shabby little temperament beneath her beautiful face.

"Thank you very much, but I don't know, I'm sure. Me and sewing's not the very best of friends."

"Well, come for a cup of tea, anyway." Mrs. Carmichael looked helplessly at her.

"I should be very pleased, I'm sure. But I don't get much time, do I?"

"No," said Victor, as she looked at him.

"I hope you'll come the first day you can," the mother persisted.

"Thanks, I'm sure. I don't often get down as far as here now, but I'll do my best."

"I don't know where you live. But we're near the trams from most parts," said Mrs. Carmichael still. "Good night."

"Good night," said the girl stolidly.

Mrs. Carmichael began to move away slowly, thinking. But in a minute her walk had become quick and uneasy, and thus she and Jimmy went home. At the door she said bitterly:

"That was a *common* girl."

And for the next few days nothing distracted her from her bitterness and her fear. Not even to spare Jimmy could she disguise the sorrow that had fallen on her. All her mere irritation against Victor had vanished: the deepest feelings of her heart had nothing to do with irritation, and it was her deepest feelings that were working now. Each evening as she sat she was charged with gloom. The whole atmosphere of his home was changed for Jimmy; she had always spared him before, she had let nothing touch him, she had never been so unwatchful of his peace as now. But this was too much for her.

He could hardly bear the tense, heavy distress of his hours at home. He felt for her intolerably, but he hated to have to feel for her. One evening when Victor was out and he sat with his mother, she said after a long, pregnant silence:

"If he shouldn't be good. I don't know what I should do. . . ."

And Jimmy suffered under her prolonged suspense and unhappiness, and so the next night he did not come home. He had dinner in town and went to a

theatre with one of his fellow clerks. He enjoyed it very little, it was so out of his habit, but he could not bear what was at home; it was better than that.

And most emphatically he did not want any change from his peace and routine. He was becoming a man of fixed routine; he fell easily into it; it made him feel right with himself that he should be doing to-day just what he had done yesterday. His habits grew strong on him. Every morning coming out of his bath he rubbed himself dry with his hands. It was good to do it, to feel himself glow with the energy and warmth; but it was more than doubly good because it belonged to weeks and months and years now. At his meals, everywhere, his habits fastened on him. His habits were all the time forging little links with things he loved simply because they were himself in the past. By memory, sequence and order, he reproduced himself faithfully day by day. His very exterior aspect did not change even with different suits he wore, for he was the kind of man with whom a new suit partakes immediately of his normal appearance.

And at the office, which was the home of routine, Jimmy even added a touch of sameness by his unchanging punctuality and appearance and voice and replies. All the clerks worked by habit, but Jimmy's was the most regular and established. His voice dealt specifically with the different tags of the office routine, so that if a fellow-clerk was in the next room, hearing only the sound of his voice and not the words, he could still tell from Jimmy's fixed habit of intonation exactly what he was saying.

And to the collectors Jimmy always gave his answers quick with habit, never varying.

A collector would come in and ask for a certain book provided it cost a shilling.

"Not done," said Jimmy.

"Six shillings only?"

"Six shillings only," said Jimmy, his low voice just dropping into severity.

At the telephone, to which he had to go constantly during the day, he always repeated the order, like a telephone operator. He had felt this to be necessary as a precaution when he first came to the office, and afterwards he did it by habit. So that before he gave his answer his voice repeated in a certain tone what he had heard.

"'The Romance of Old Gardens.' The price, and if done Colonial." Then, his deep voice changing automatically, he said: "Price fifteen shillings net, not done Colonial."

That was different from Victor who, saying little, loaded his words with expressiveness, loaded them with the pent-up meaning of all that he did not say. His faltering speech had given him the habit of restricted words, but these were always exaggerated with expression. So that when at home his mother asked him if he would have some more meat, and he said "No, not any more," his expressiveness would make the words sound somehow rich and dark with negative. It would have been difficult for him ever to use words, those difficult elusive things, so automatically as Jimmy used them at the office when he said with a fixed habit of intonation: "Twenty-five at three-and-fourpence net, no odd copies," or some other phrase of the language of his business; Victor would have made it sound epic.

Jimmy was deeply incensed against Victor on account of all that he meant of unrest and suffering for their mother. He spoke to him hardly at all, often succeeding in blocking him out of his notice though he was living with him. But sometimes his irritation was deeply aware of him. Then after a period of keen, suppressed irritation with him during an evening, as soon as their mother went to bed and they went together into the library to read it was different.

There one mood alone lived between them, and had always lived. Jimmy might feel a fire of intolerance against him up till the very threshold of the library, but, once inside, there was something older than that, there was habit.

There they sat together and might have been boys again.

Every evening Mrs. Carmichael watched apprehensively to see whether Victor would go out. When he did not go it was to Jimmy a relief for her sake, and it was an oppression too. He hated both the relief and the oppression; he hated to have to feel anything at all about it. One evening, catching sight of Victor suddenly, as he sat close and quiet by his mother, a great contempt rose overpoweringly in Jimmy. Victor looked pale and dull, his lank hair falling in wisps across his forehead, his eyes heavy after a headache, his body seeming to be something that even he himself did not like. And Jimmy resented it, resented the way he watched their mother, and put a cushion at her back, doing these things with obvious love even while he was torturing her with doubt and apprehension. Jimmy wanted an empty atmosphere, but by Victor it was charged with one thing or another. Their mother went to bed; it was half-past ten; Jimmy carried the lamp into the library. His contempt burned in him, an angry fire. Victor followed him in, his slippers dragging, his eyes tired. Jimmy took out a volume and sat down. Every now and then his contempt still rose in waves in him. But it was contempt against the mental picture of Victor lounging by his mother upstairs in the sitting-room—it was not directed against the real Victor sitting here at his side: he went free. His contempt travelled upstairs to his mother's sitting-room, dark now, the chairs pushed back at haphazard, the cushions still dented, the warmth from the lamp still floating in the air. There the shaft travelled to find its object;

it did not touch Victor near at hand. Of all Jimmy's habits this reading was the oldest.

He settled himself comfortably to read, his voice coming out low and lazily, always the same. Sometimes his pipe stayed in his mouth, when one side of his lips moved more than the other, and his voice, a little obscured, was still pleasant.

He would stop to smoke harder and say something.

"Whatever's this fellow driving at now? Rather off the track, I should imagine."

Victor, smoking, listening, said nothing.

"He seems to be saying just the contrary of what he said a moment ago." He was indifferent and unsure of his ground, but he liked to find things wrong or absurd.

"No," said Victor.

"Well, so it struck me, all this page. *I* don't know what he's after," he said in a kind of enjoyment of doubt.

He often failed quite to understand, and liked to attribute the fault to the book, but it was all quite indifferent; he had no feeling about it, and did not want to be made to understand.

But Victor explained, his halting words giving slowly and difficultly the meaning that was like a clear light in his mind.

"Oh. I didn't altogether get that," said Jimmy. In his contented voice he pushed on.

At the office he was worried by the difficulties of a fellow clerk. Brabazon was a small, fair man with a repressed manner; his desk was close to Jimmy's, and though his attitude had always been reserved, there was friendliness in their intercourse. Now Brabazon's troubles seemed to burst from him, through his reserve, communicating themselves oppressively to Jimmy. He confided to him that he had got into trouble and must have money. He did not expect Jimmy to help him; he seemed beyond hope, and the

confidence was simply a statement of despair. For days Jimmy was wretchedly aware of Brabazon's horrible fear and anxiety; he saw him writing careful private letters and could imagine the slightly stilted and heavy manner of the appeal they made; he watched him scribbling down figures on the blotting-paper, adding and subtracting; and he knew exactly how the thinness and the pallor of his face grew day by day. He hated to notice, but it forced itself on him.

"I wouldn't trouble if I were you," he said to him one day.

"You don't understand—I must. I can't put it off any longer."

"Well, I wouldn't worry if I were you," Jimmy said to him uneasily.

However often he said it, it made no difference. At last one day Jimmy offered him fifty pounds, to be returned when he had put himself right again.

"Yes, yes," said Jimmy nervously, "that's all right, that's quite all right," as his friend's thanks poured out. He felt awkward and wanted to get away. But Brabazon seemed to hold on to him with his amazed gratitude. He would do anything, as a sign of his thanks. What had he to give in return?

"It's with a girl," he began. "I've got to see her through—I wasn't quite straight with her. I—" He was almost eager to tell the whole story. It was the kind of story people are interested in, and it would be making some little return to tell it in all its detail. He was willing; he wanted to give out in his gratitude. But as he began to relate it he could not help feeling Jimmy's complete want of interest. Such affairs had no glamour for him, none. He did not want them for himself and had no wish to hear of them. Things that did not come into his scheme of life for himself he was dead to, utterly dead in his interest. Brabazon stopped; he could make no

return; his face was moved and alight with gratitude, and then sobered and dulled as suddenly he looked at his future. He walked away, thankful and quiet.

And now Jimmy could come into the office in the morning and be placid and untormented. It was a great relief. Almost immediately, Brabazon was married, and received the congratulations of the office. The office did not discover about the wedding until a few days after it had occurred. When Brabazon received the congratulations he looked vaguely surprised and moved. To hear such talk of his happiness seemed to give him a new thought about his sober marriage; he listened, surprised, hopeful, and that evening he went home with more hurry than he had done on the preceding evenings.

One morning Mrs. Carmichael saw in the paper that Mr. Rendel had died in Bristol, and she read out the announcement to her sons. They were sorry that they were so out of touch with Clifford now, so that condoling letters to him would have the long strange silence to make them awkward. Though they both meant to write, only Jimmy wrote in the end, and he received no answer.

ii

They were playing hockey again this season, on Sunday mornings this year, and Cynthia Bradley was there, still shy and beautiful, playing better than ever. She was now engaged, and came and went always with her man; he was a county-player, and the club was very proud of him. Victor watched the two, fascinated by what they were to each other. They played their perfect cool games, seeming hardly to notice each other; even when the man or the girl did something particularly good they did not look, they were proud. And Victor, so different himself, wondered at them, for if one of his wild strokes should happen to be effective, he could not help glancing

furtively round to look for admiration. But they never looked; only they did wonderful things and were happy. And once when the man was playing his game, unconscious of her, detached, and so clever that one of the other players would perhaps suddenly stand still and laugh to see how he ran with the ball in the air, catching it each time on the end of his stick, and as in a sudden rush to stop him Cynthia was knocked to the ground, in a moment her man was at her side, his face pale, something come there which had been hidden, and she smiled at him, so that their love was suddenly exposed. And Victor felt in those two something of the beauty which he knew was natural to his own heart. He could hardly bear to be still outside. "When I love a girl, a wonderful girl—" he kept thinking, "a wonderful girl—" What his life was going to be! He knew it, knew it well, and it was hard to wait.

In the times when that was clear to him then he loathed the hours he spent with common girls, violating himself with his easy intimacy. He had not yet been so unfaithful to his ideal as to defile himself utterly, but whenever he felt that some one had a poor opinion of him it became his habit to restore his confidence in himself by going out to make a wretched conquest, as he could easily do, over some girl. Especially Jimmy's contempt he could not endure, and he always sought quick refuge from it. But never did the shame and remorse which followed grow less. His remorse was peculiar, it devastated him; he could almost have died of it.

One day he had a row with Jimmy. It was Saturday afternoon, and Jimmy came home at three o'clock. The suburban traffic was increasing, and he had grown to hate the rush and scramble and discomfort, and he came home dissatisfied. It was raining hard, a cold rain in February, and he hurried, hating it. He saw his dog outside as he came down the road. She

was trotting about, absorbed, unaware of him, as she went from one spot of the road to another, her head low. He could see her intent trot as she left the road to tread the enticing soil of Scrutton Grounds, which rose brokenly on one side. At one place Scrutton Grounds in a rich mood had grown grass; it was long and wet, and she walked into it.

"She'll be wet through," he thought. A wave of happiness came over him.

He gave a little low whistle. He saw her hardly move but grow rigid and tense, waiting. He whistled again. She turned and saw him. He stood still. "Daisy!" he called. She ran to him, she came rushing through the tangled drenched grass. Twice she leapt high in it, to come quicker. And Jimmy was very pleased to come home.

Indoors his mother had made a large fire.

"And whose slippers are those?" he asked.

"It's just a new pair, dear," she said apologetically. She was sometimes afraid of being a nuisance with all she did for him. To get him a pair of slippers was a kind of indulgence for which she felt half-ashamed.

"Try them on if you like, dear," she said. "They're only a pair of bedroom slippers."

"Well, which foot is which?"

"You don't have to think of that," she reassured him; "they're right for either foot."

He put them on, smiling at her.

"Which means, of course, that they're *wrong* for either foot," he said, patting his feet uncomfortably on the ground. "Right for both means wrong for both." But he kept them on, and he had a look of great content.

His face had grown red out in the rain. He idled about in the soft slippers, smoking, never going far from the fire. Daisy lay asleep on the rug. Only if he went anywhere near the door she opened her eyes.

"Jimmy," said his mother, "I've been thinking we'd better have a few more people here."

"For whose sake would that be—theirs or ours?"

"Victor's."

"Oh, yes," he said hurriedly. He hated the look of terrible anxiety on her face. "Very well, that'll be all right," he said, with his quick way of trying to pacify.

"So as to make him contented with his home and not——"

"Yes, I suppose we can ask people," he said, resenting it. "All right, mother. Look at her," he said. "Do you notice? She'll screw her eyes round till they're all white if I come over here; what she won't do is move her head."

"No, just her eyes," said his mother.

They were happy again, and soon they had tea. Victor did not come; he had had a headache, and could not eat. She pressed the things on Jimmy, for he did not always abide by his no, but in what he ate was easily persuaded.

"Have a piece of that cake," she said.

"No, thanks."

"Shall I cut it open, and then you can see it inside."

"No you needn't cut it open. That cake has no secrets for me." He liked in a mild way to make the cake ridiculous; he dawdled with it. "When you've seen that cake outside you've seen it inside: it's not keeping anything back."

"Have just a small piece," she said.

"Not much, then."

But when Victor came into the room all her anxiety came on her again. She did not want him to go out tonight, she could think of nothing but that. The image of the girl haunted her. And Jimmy hated the evening to be spent in this stress of watchfulness and anxiety.

Mrs. Carmichael left the room for a few minutes, and quickly and sharply it came.

"Well, I'm going out," said Victor.

"You'd better stay in." Immediately he wished he had not said it.

"Why is that?"

"I think she seems to be worrying for you to stay, or something. . . ."

"Then that's between her and m-m-me, between her and me."

"I'm sorry for her, in that case."

"So you're telling me to stay in."

"Well, I'm thinking perhaps you might."

"I was going out into the air for a bit to get my head better, and you sit there like a—like a—and tell me not to go."

"Oh no, not if that was it."

"Well, damn you, who said it was anything else?"

"No, that's all right," said Jimmy, stooping to pat Daisy. "I believe it's stopped raining."

"You'd better not order me about, you know," said Victor.

"No, that's all right."

"I'm not the kind you can, you know." His narrow white face was pitiable with his pride that felt grand to him but looked somehow poor.

"I'm not ordering you about. If I ordered you about you'd be different."

"How? More like you?"

"You'd get something to do. And you wouldn't be seen about with those low girls."

"So that's what you think. But do you know really what you think isn't interesting?" He smiled tauntingly. He felt almost mad with the desire to turn on Jimmy a deadly battery of scorn.

"Well, it's what I think, anyway."

"Fancy *you* despising *me!*" said Victor. How he hoped that this was hard, biting, intolerable irony.

"Why don't you get something to do?" said Jimmy, very pale.

With a great effort Victor controlled himself. He wanted to hurt some one, to kick the dog, to twist something round in his hands, farther, farther, until in agony it broke. But for once he kept still his arms, and kept back his words, and walked out of the room.

iii

He put on his things and went outside. It had stopped raining and was very cold. He went down to the tram terminus. It was all busy and light, being Saturday evening. The shops were no longer empty and expectant as they had been on that evening years ago when he stood there to meet Rose; they were now quite busily coping with trade. But the seaside illusion had vanished; it was a thick little bit of London suburb now. The entrance to a newly built picture-palace made the pavement as light as day, and every now and then people passed into it. Some of them came more as in another part of London they would arrive at a theatre, coming purposefully from a distance, in cloaks, and with scarves on their heads.

He had controlled his temper, and so there was no remorse. But there was a narrow little soul inside him, which Jimmy could put there. He was just a wretched incompetent wastrel, was he? He was some one to be despised? How small and strait he felt! It was terrible. He knew what it was to feel that all Nature belonged to him, that hills and winds were what they were simply because he was what he was—as if, had he been at all different, then all Nature would have been different too. That was a genuine, inevitable feeling. And now came this abasement and humiliation, when he felt his soul was thin. He was unable to get up in the mornings, he never did a day's work, he was below all other men, ill, ugly, the world passing him by in scorn, admitting

him to nothing. It could not, *could not* be true. Yet was it ?

He became afraid, as afraid of life as he was of death. Life could be so glorious—surely only he knew what a glory there was, just out of reach, but there ; and he had always felt wonderful things coming, coming, and surely they must come soon. But now he was so poor and wretched. " I waste half the morning in bed." That kept coming to him. And then, worse : " And I look ill, I look ill." He did not think of other things than that. Just those two things kept coming to him to torment him.

And he might die soon and leave the world that he was ready to love as it had never been loved before. He felt it scorn him, as if already it were pushing him off. The very intentness with which the people in the streets went about their shopping seemed to decide against him, that he had nothing to do with life.

The fear of death obsessed him at the smallest encouragement. He had two kinds of fear : one, when he felt ill and took stock of his symptoms and did everything he could to allay them so as to live. The other kind of fear was when in perfect health he thought of death, and knew that it was waiting, in the end. This was the worst, for there was no fight to be made then, no hope, no escape. He simply felt the fact of death, let realization of it sink a little more and more deeply into his flesh. " The end, oblivion," he thought. " I shall not even know that I am dead."

As he strolled along to-night the solitude of death was upon him. But suddenly he met a glance that was for him specially, conscious of him, warm for him. He started, altered his expression and looked sharply to see if he had been mistaken. A rush of pride came to his heart. He went up to her with the confidence and mastery which were always a little surprising coming from the man who at a first glance looked ineffectual.

Then it was as it had been before. She was a stranger. They walked together for an hour through the quieter roads. He felt a fierce pride in being to her as good as other men. He exaggerated passion.

But when he left her he knew that this must end. It must end. There must come soon something that had nothing to do with shame; there must. He thought he would pray for it, on his knees, by his bed that night. When the time came, and he went to bed, he forgot about it—but that thought that he would pray had been a strong prayer.

CHAPTER IX

i

It was splendid when Clifford walked in one day. They had forgotten how much they liked him, until his great figure stood in the door, and his handsome face smiled down at them, and the familiar voice said :

" How do you do, Mrs. Carmichael ? "

When she went away to prepare a special tea, the three young men sat together. It was Good Friday. It was a day of a new delicate warmth, and they opened the window wide. Outside, in Dacre Lane, stood a motor car. It was painted red, and its padded red-leather seats were the picture of comfort ; far away in front of it stretched two of its powerful wheels, as if stretching to go ; it stood there in stillness. They looked at it from the window before going out to it.

" Not your own, is it ? " asked Jimmy.

" Rather."

" That yours ? "

" Yes, it's the only game worth playing at just now. She's a pretty up-to-date car." He gave them some of her points. He towered above them, standing at the window. His great blue overcoat still hung on him. It was extraordinarily pleasant to be near him. He was very much what he used to be, only a little more he had adopted a superficial air of mannered boredom and indifference. They both watched his face while he spoke.

" I left Bristol in her last night—say nine o'clock. Toddled down to Weston-super-Mud, spent the night

there and left at about ten this morning. Lunched here in London at one o'clock. Not bad ? "

" Jolly *good* ! " said Victor.

They went outside and examined the car. Clifford had a great deal to say about it, his careless voice being a very thin disguise of his absorption. They came in again, and he took off his coat and flung it down, and lit a cigarette. They watched him, pleased. All the afternoon had become different.

" What's the news ? " he said. " Hallo, there's a dog."

" Yes," said Victor eagerly. " Come on, Daisy ! "

Victor behaved as if the dog belonged to him, showing her off. He was so pleased Clifford had come that he could not wait for anyone else to answer the things Clifford said. Even when he spoke directly to Jimmy, Victor would answer. " She's just six years," he said. He tried to tell Clifford that she was a good house-dog, but he got tied up in one of the words, struggling with it, on his face a helpless wistful look. But Clifford did not wait to hear; he was full of questions. Victor's face began to lose the air of romantic melancholy it had worn during the day.

Until he came, Victor had been miserable because of the day. He had gone out, and resented the shops being closed, the wandering crowds of people, the sense of holiday which brought him such deadly depression unless he himself was in the holiday mood with some inner source of excitement. He felt thrown back on himself, on emptiness. He went to church with his mother and Jimmy, but not there, even with the painstaking thoughts he had (in case there was fulfilment in religion), could he be so above temporal things as to lessen in the least degree the depression caused him by the closed shops and the stagnation of the day. The Good Friday house-painters on their ladders at work here and there in the streets he had walked through only emphasized the general stag-

nation. He knew that some day some happiness of his own would make him invulnerable to these passing depressing influences, but now, when he had nothing within, and was waiting for everything from without, he loathed the locked-away aspect the world had, and as he sat in the early afternoon before Clifford came, he could hardly bear the quiet there was in the two roads, nor the sound of church bells coming through the sun.

Now Clifford kept reminding them of things in old days, and Jimmy kindled with pleasure. Occasionally they all laughed together loudly. When Mrs. Carmichael in the kitchen heard them, she picked out Jimmy's laugh to listen to, and her heart warmed, and she stayed still, her knife poised in the air, while it lasted, singling out Jimmy's laugh, smiling herself.

And as Clifford looked out at Scrutton Grounds, he cried:

"And do you remember Jimmy's hit into an old tin, and we were looking for that ball for an hour! And do you remember that catch I made?" He flung his left arm above his head, and blinked his eyes as if the sun were in them, giving a very dramatic idea of his feat. He stayed like that for some moments, looking at them, thoroughly to recall it and dwell on it. And though for most other things they laughed in the joy of remembering, something absurd in Clifford's attitude prompted Jimmy to pretend not to remember the famous catch—and Victor joined in.

"You may have," said Jimmy.

Clifford turned on him in astonishment.

"Not that catch I jumped up to, left hand, sun in my eyes!"

"I daresay you're right," said Jimmy.

"What, you mean to say ——" he began in amazement, then saw the pretence and brought down his arm with a little disgusted laugh.

"We've only got your w-w-word for it," said Victor,

carrying on the joke after it was over. He continued to think of what he had said, after the others had passed on.

Jimmy gave Clifford an account of his work. He enjoyed Clifford's disgust, and liked to make his work out worse than it was. It was very like Jimmy to enjoy making it sound ridiculously bad, from the perfect security of his own secret satisfaction with it.

"Yes, there I sit on my stool," he said. "Nine to six."

"Good Lord!"

"I'm hoping to get a fortnight in the summer."

"Well! . . . What do you do it for?" asked Clifford.

"In another year I may get a rise which will bring me up to ninety pounds."

Clifford gave a long whistle.

"Any decent fellows there?" he asked.

"My conversation," said Jimmy, "is almost entirely confined to talks with illiterate travellers who have come in for some book whose name they have spelt phonetically; we discuss together what it can possibly be. . . ." He was smiling, enjoying himself. He wondered what more he could say to make it bad. And inside he knew his own perfect satisfaction with it.

"Good Lord!" said Clifford again. "Well, not for me, that's all I can say."

And then he turned to Victor.

"Well, Hamlet," he said, "and what's your job?"

"Up till now I've been l-l-l-looking round, looking round. But I'm starting——"

Clifford laughed.

"I can recognize the Victorian touch there," he said. "Never shall I forget you at school, my boy, never. Do you remember Victor up before old Loseby? 'I'm sorry, sir, I wasn't able to prepare, I lost my book.' 'Lost your book? Couldn't you borrow another?' 'That didn't occur to m-m-me,

sir.' And the innocent look he had! Priceless!" Clifford's pleasant bored voice seemed to saunter through the room. "Then old Loseby," he went on, remembering more: 'How shall we impress on Carmichael the fact that he might have borrowed a book. Let us try if a hundred lines of Virgil will consummate the desired effect.'"

"On Tuesday I start," said Victor, his voice full of importance. "An uncle of mine, I'm going to, in the city. It's an enormous concern—stationery. Clarke, the firm is. I'm to be in the advertising dep-p-partment, the advertising department."

Clifford shook his head.

"It's no good, you know," he said. "Take my own case. My father dies. There I am, left with a great business on my hands. Well, I can spend my life pottering round, talking to my foreman, overlooking accounts, and keeping my eye on the price of material as if it was the beginning and end of all things, overlooking contracts—that's what my father did. Well, he *liked* doing it. Or, equally, I can simply sell the whole concern." He glanced carelessly out of the window, where the powerful red car stood in its extraordinary stillness. "What I mean to say is, you want to consider your own temperament in these things."

"Are you going to sell the business?" asked Jimmy.

"Not going to, my boy, it's done," he said laconically.

He jumped up to help Mrs. Carmichael with the distribution of the tea-cups.

"And now when will you honour the car, Mrs. Carmichael?" he asked in the pleasant gallant manner that he had with women.

"Me?" she said. "No, that's not for me. You take the others."

"Now you won't disappoint me, Mrs. Carmichael,"

he said. "I counted on your coming." And she felt wonderfully drawn in.

After he had gone that night, Mrs. Carmichael came into the library to say good-night. She knew her two sons had been happy. She knew their different kinds of happiness. Jimmy's was like approval, a perfect satisfaction. But Victor—he had put too much into it; she was uneasy when she saw a certain mood on him, when he seemed to expect everything of this world.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, mother," said Jimmy.

"Good-night, darling," said Victor, going to kiss her.

She lingered by the table. Her heart was heavy over her eldest son.

She stayed there, and they wondered.

"Christ died for us to-day," she reminded them simply at last.

When the next day Clifford sped noiselessly to their door, she was ready, her face flushed with pleasure, looking strongly young as she did in any emotion. She did not look at Jimmy, she almost forgot him in her excitement, but deep in her mind she was proud because his friend had wanted her, because they were all doing something together, and she was one of them.

ii

It was working well that they should have more people to the house, and that Victor should go off every day to business. His mother was more safe about him; she knew he suddenly imagined himself as a business man, and therefore did not need to imagine himself as anything else. Only he was so full of his new position, he saw so much more in it than there was, that she wondered how long it could last.

His very step as he left the house and walked down

Park Lane, showed how important he felt his going to be. What was he putting into it? He was putting into it all his hopes for his own significance in the world. Now that out of shame he had gone to work, he wondered how he could have waited so long. The work was no longer something that out of shame he was forced into—no, in these first days it was like something wonderful that he had always known would come true. He felt above what he had been as yet, beyond. The world that he worshipped now suddenly seemed to withhold itself a little less; it was admitting him, having something to do with him. All the gratification that a man can feel about great achievements he felt when he walked down the street, late, hurrying, when he sat at his own desk and handled his papers. It was a fulfilment, it was a little entry into life, the best entry he had perhaps yet known. There had been reading, of course—that was an entry too. When he read, something inside him became bare, sensitive, something in him lay exposed, and of everything that touched it, it took a record just and true. Then there was his vision of Nature, when he saw and knew it, and worshipped from outside. Then there was his love of a woman to come, which now and then he seemed just faintly to foretell with girls he already knew. And yet this going to work was really the most personal, intimate thing of all that had happened to him; it carried him the farthest. It was only doing what other men did, and yet nothing had ever given him so much the sense that his own personality was being accepted of the world.

At first his days were employed in the arrangement of an illustrated catalogue of the firm's wares. It was a very large affair, and a small section of it was put into his charge, with last year's catalogue for a guide. With scissors and paste he disposed, on blank pieces of paper, strips of letterpress and illustrations, to go to the printer. He was intensely interested, and

gratified with his results. He would hold a sheet out at arm's length, with his head on one side and his eyes screwed up, judging, appraising.

He was dealing, for instance, with the notepaper section, and his first illustration was merely a series of bars of black, starting narrow and growing wider. This was so that customers in mourning might choose the width of border they required. He then fitted in some letterpress about stamped note-paper: *i, Relief Stamping, from Customers' own Dies; ii, Printed Addresses.* He arranged the examples of both these on the page, choosing specimen addresses, and examples of the different kinds of steel dies and printed addresses. 19 Berners Street, W., was big and bold and black; The Gables, Ramsgate, was in thin, spidery, fantastic letters. He arranged them all in an elaborate pattern, some slanted effectively across the corners of the page, fitting them in.

On the next page he had to arrange samples of visiting-cards. Here the style varied again. Major Courteney was in small, upright letters; Lady Mansfield's copper-plate had been engraved in a delicate slant, called Writing Style. He was very involved in all he did. He felt acute preferences for one style over another.

For many, many days he was engaged on this, and he thought with a kind of awe of the day when the catalogue would appear.

And at home the evenings had become sociable. Clifford stayed so late sometimes that there was less reading now than ever before. The library became thick with smoke, and glasses stood on the table. There were two other old school-friends besides Clifford who came to see them, and a new friend of Jimmy's from the office. Jimmy was perfectly pleasant and friendly with anyone new, but for a friend like Clifford, bound to him by old associations and habits, there was something different, something warm, deep-rooted.

His affections only became strong when they were a habit. And he cared for people almost entirely by the measure of the age of his intercourse with them.

Clifford would come at any time, without warning. He brought presents to Mrs. Carmichael. He had a talent for carpentering, and he put up a shelf for her where she wanted one. He liked to wander about the half-circular gravel path in front of the house, beside which ran a long, empty-looking border. He looked at what was coming up, and put in some seeds of alyssum. He liked the dog, he liked teasing her, while Jimmy looked on, allowing it but not taking any part—glad when the dog, puzzled, ran to him and from his side stood glaring, alert and interested, back at Clifford. Then Jimmy let his hand wander affectionately down the dog's silky back, telling her in this touch of his hand his tenderness for her, while she, unheeding, stood tensely watching Clifford.

She learned to associate Clifford with adventure—not always intelligible, but good fun. If he only looked at her she immediately struck a responsive attitude, her two front legs collapsing flat, wide apart, on the floor under her, while she glared, ready.

Sometimes they all roared with laughter at her, and again Jimmy's hand would go out to her, as it were secretly. They loved it when she seemed to get the better of them, then they laughed the most. One evening Clifford was lying lazily on the sofa in the library; he had been motoring all day, played upon by the splendid spring weather, and was red and sleepy. He had brought Mrs. Carmichael a box of sweets, which lay beside him, and as Daisy showed an importunate interest, he at last gave her one. It was made of strong peppermint, and Clifford turned over, more alert, to watch her discomfort. Daisy took it in her mouth; she made a great show of biting it, her head nodding busily with the movement of her jaws. But soon there was a little thud on the floor as the

sweet was dropped from her mouth perfectly whole, without a blemish, and she trotted back to Jimmy's side and lay there contentedly, while Clifford laughed.

Those evenings with only Clifford and Victor were what Jimmy liked the best, when the three of them were perfectly at ease, saying only what they wanted to say. When other men came there was more talk. There was a man called Bayliss who at this time had the habit of coming out to them on Sunday evenings, and with him came the man he lived with, Irvine. They had all been at school together. Bayliss was a great talker, with a bright, versatile mind and unlimited interest. When they spoke only on the edges of things Jimmy was still taking part, ridiculing a little, liking to discover absurdities; but when they got deeper, when Bayliss worried at a subject with his sharp, keen, interested mind, on fire with a kind of social passion, then Jimmy fell out, and just sat smoking in silence.

But it was then that Victor would edge his chair near—his glass, which he perpetually refilled, in his hand, his deep blue eyes bent fixedly on the speaker, sometimes his mouth opening to speak but not saying anything in time. They talked about religion.

"I believe in happiness in this world," Victor broke in. "The other world—well, it may be wonderful, but we don't *know*——"

And he would hardly hear the reply, hardly know that anyone was replying. Keen on his face lingered the expression with which he spoke—lingered on and on while he glanced almost furtively from one to another to see the effect his opinion made. In that way he always dropped quickly out of conversations, lingering too long on his own contribution, while the talk went on far ahead without him.

At other times he flared with anger. And in his anger he would know that somehow he was not impressive, but still hope against hope that he was. Often

after speaking he would think bitterly: "What was that I said? No, I meant something different from that."

Victor was a Liberal in politics, and at this time it was hardly safe to make the most casual remark of political bearing for fear of what it might arouse in him. He had felt that Liberalism stood in general life for the expansion which he so craved for in his own particular life, and so he had tacked himself on to it, and was in a state of such violent partisanship as must have gratified the party leaders could they have known of it. He had not very much knowledge behind his feeling, except what he gathered from reading every day the leaders in two Liberal papers. But what he lacked in argument he made up in prejudice and scorn. By the time Bayliss came on these evenings preaching his Socialism, Victor was too well established in his opinions to be led off in that direction, but he was often enraged, stammering, pale, thinking he could beat him on his points, and, when he could not, his only resource was to let his anger burst out of him uncontrolled. Did anger do what argument had not done? The others talked on, and Victor's anger seemed only to exist for himself, recoiling on him, absorbing him alone, while the others talked on with things to say.

CHAPTER X

i

In the spring of his twenty-sixth year, when he had been at his work for two years, Victor's disenchantment with it was complete, and altogether a change came over him. His mother could not get him up in the morning. "We've Victor in bed still," she would say bitterly. That was how she always put it, making it almost national. If Mrs. Fokes went by with her child in the morning sunshine and Mrs. Carmichael stepped out to speak to her, she had a certain bitter expression for saying, "We've Victor still in bed."

"Ill?"

"No."

"That particular type of temperament——" began Mrs. Fokes cajolingly; but she left it at that when she saw the uncompromising look on her friend's face.

To his employers he always gave as excuse that he was unwell, and it was on the score of his health that they eventually decided to part with him when they could no longer countenance his unpunctuality.

He left his work very callously, loathing the routine as soon as he ceased to feel that it was a door to all the splendour of human energy. It was soon a tedium and a restraint, not an energy at all, and he loathed it.

The single regret that he had in leaving was that he would no longer be able to experiment with different kinds of type, as he had been more and more doing in his advertisements. He loved sending new in-

structions to the printers, and waited to see what kind of a proof they would send him. He loved a great variety of lines and capitals and italics and borders, to brighten up a page, and a favourite device, which he thought could never fail to tell, was simply to have a line of print set slanting across a page instead of straight. If "Clarke's Favourite Kalendar" did not please him set straight across the page, he took out a line of something else, to make more space, and slanted it, and then—it looked something. The pages he arranged certainly never suffered from monotony. Sometimes they looked more like a printer's page of specimen types than anything else, when he had given full play to his fancy.

He was among the last and most faithful adherents to *l'art nouveau*; he continued to make use of it even when its vogue had passed. If he had been entirely outside it, he would have known how bad it was, because his taste when it was impersonal was sound. But because he made use of it, performed it himself, he confused it with his own pride of achievement and admired it exceedingly. He made lavish play with it in his advertisements. He loved using words with the letter *o* in them, and putting the *o* very small and high with a dot underneath it. Sometimes the letters he made use of were artistic almost to the point of complete disguise.

After he left business Victor spent his days mostly with Clifford. Into a certain kind of excitement of living he plunged deeply at this time. He spent money freely, and he caught from Clifford a greater ease of manner. He stammered very little now, only enough to be rather interesting. His clothes were so well chosen and his general bearing so much more effective that people marked his appearance with interest. His hair for all its dull colour was beautiful, and it strayed on to his forehead, and his dark blue eyes shone underneath in a way that made one feel

on the brink of something rare. He was now taken always for a painter or an actor, and his slightly unconventional clothes helped to give the effect. He spent money so carelessly that even Clifford was amazed. They had adventures when Victor's recklessness was such that he became a by-word among Clifford's friends.

On some nights he drank a great deal, and at all times he was very ready to try a new wine and to indulge in it very freely if he approved of it. But what he specially became notorious for was his quick violent temper, which had lasted from his childhood and now led him into all kinds of disputes at unlikely times and places. At the slightest provocation his strong sense of personal injury and determination to impose himself made him break out in anger—with the waiter who served someone else before him, or the man who jostled him in a crowd, or especially with anyone who uttered Conservative opinions in a political argument. His anger had no embarrassments, but came bursting out, taking people by surprise. Clifford and his other companions, half-amused, half-contemptuous, often extricated him from what might have been serious results of his outbursts. He himself was very reckless and feared nothing. Often, when he had been drinking a little more than usual, he indulged in wild reckless jokes; in that mood he was utterly fearless of public opinion, and did whatever came into his head.

And in his soul there was misery.

He and Clifford were nearly always together. And yet he knew in his heart that Clifford's enjoyment of his daring was half contempt, and that Jimmy at home doing nothing was still the friend Clifford cared for.

The car took them everywhere, country and town. In the country they rushed through vast distances, absorbed in the one idea of speed, while the dust of

many miles accumulated on the car, obliterating its colour. In London, the bright red car immaculately clean, they seemed only to stroll in it through the streets or in the park. On summer nights, when they were dining out, Victor sat in the car in dress-clothes without an overcoat while the passage of the car made a little fresh movement of air in the stifling streets; and he revelled in the luxury. If only the *soul* were not missing still from everything! Often Clifford would bring girls to go out with them. Victor went back uneasily to his mother and Jimmy, but their liking for Clifford helped to make his absence with him an easy and natural circumstance.

Once at the house of one of Clifford's friends a girl sang a song which Victor heard with sudden terrible directness, as if his whole being had stopped to listen.

Songs my mother taught me,
In the days long vanished;
Seldom were the tear-drops
From her eyelids banished.

As he heard the wild northern passion of the melody, with its pathetic wandering of notes—as if they searched hopelessly from high to low, and low to high—he had an intolerable thought of his mother. Not that he could imagine her crying over him, but he felt as if her spirit were in tears.

ii

One day he accompanied Clifford when he was going to see a girl.

"I've known her for a year or two," said Clifford; "in fact, she used to live in Bristol. My sister used to know her slightly. When she got into some kind of difficulty I fancy my sister helped her out a bit. She's nice and lively. You'll see."

Victor immediately became exceedingly conscious of his appearance. He always imbued the unknown with such minute powers of observation. It was always to be so complete and deep a revelation of himself before another human being, that he felt the most slight defect would be bared and conspicuous before her. It filled him with a strange excitement when he knew he was going to meet a woman. He was on the very edge of readiness. His alert eye in the street, his quick look that made important the chance contacts of daily life, his self-conscious care of his looks and manners when he first met a girl—all these, and a hundred little triumphs and disappointments that marked every day, showed that his plunge into life had still left him only at the very beginning of adventure.

Clifford and Victor went together to a street in Pimlico, where the girl was lodging. They were shown to a room upstairs, and as they came in she looked up at them. She was exceedingly pretty, dark, with a curious bird-like brightness, making altogether a brilliant effect. Victor's eyes fixed themselves on her boldly, staring. He felt a tight excitement at his heart. He thought she was the most living thing he had ever seen. It was certainly unusual, the brilliancy of her expression and colour and movement. To be where that face was, was to feel the ordinary pitch of life raised a little.

"Ah, you're in," said Clifford.

"Am I?" she said, affecting astonishment. "Who told you?"

She did not smile now nor hardly ever—such brightness did not need to. The pitch of liveliness of her expression was already as it were just beyond smiling. Her voice was quick, with a common sound in it. For a moment Victor hated it, but after that moment he never noticed its commonness again. He perceived at once that she was of the same class as girls

whom he already knew, and that made him feel natural and bold. But she was more vivid and alluring than anyone he had known, and he stared at her to know her perfectly.

"This is Victor Carmichael," said Clifford—"and—oh, Edie Cumming," he said in a careless introduction.

For a moment she took no notice, bundling some things off a chair so that Clifford could sit down.

"How serious your friend looks," she then said to Clifford with a mock dismayed glance.

"Well, so he is. He's a very clever fellow, is young Victor," said Clifford. He had a way of calling Victor clever; he often did so to his friends. It flattered Victor, and yet he had a suspicion that Clifford only said this to pass him off if he was appearing awkward or dull.

"I made sure I should be seeing the sight of your face before long," she said to Clifford. "I was saying so to Vi Porter only yesterday. Let's see, I forget how you came up, but I know I said you'd be sure to look in."

"Well, how are you?" said Clifford. He looked at her with kind, familiar eyes.

"Better, my friend. I've had one month of hospital, four weeks too much. Now I'm going to enjoy myself a bit; I mean to have a good time now for a change. I only came out yesterday, Vi's the only one I've clapped eyes on yet. She said: 'You've grown thinner.' I said: 'I don't see where I have.'"

"You're looking first-rate," said Clifford.

"But in *there!* It'd be enough to make anybody thin. This young girl next to me—well, she had the whole ward against her in the end, it wasn't only me. One day when I was starving on milk and medicine I got someone from the kitchen to bring me a bit of pudding, strictly private you understand. Well this girl gets talking about it that night, and finally in

the end it comes round to the nurse's ears, and there's no end of a row. She needn't have opened her mouth. I was feeling too bad at the time or else I'd have told her off, oh I would."

Her talk was just what Victor knew well, but she herself was unknown, fascinating beyond the others, aloof and desirable. She had a self-containedness and a composure which made her seem just withheld, refused, and this filled Victor with a new delight. As she went on talking, now and then he tried to look away from her face—at her room, and her furniture, or at Clifford, but always immediately his eyes would flash back again to her even in the very moment of their leaving her, and dwell on her, fixed, absorbed.

He felt that soon when he should have to go out of her door it would be to a dull blank world. While she and Clifford talked in their light friendly way, Victor was longing to assert himself with her. He assumed a smile, easy, familiar, bold with meaning, in case she should look at him and see. More difficult than that was conversation, which however he felt he must do something about, and in their next pause he spoke, his meaning eyes fixed freely on her even while he struggled with the nervous difficulty of speech.

"It's quite hot out to-day," he said.

"Is it? Who told you?" she said, slightly mocking, and seemed to pass him over.

He thrilled to the call she made to his full power. He said some more things, nervous, inadequate, because conversation had to be so with him, but all the time there was a great laugh of confidence within him, and he looked at her, and knew that he would insist himself on her, to subdue her, that this was only postponement. When he spoke, and her bright mocking eyes seemed to pass him by, then his heart beat fast with impatience at this postponement of what he would do with her. His heart beat with

impatience, and yet he could have laughed because as yet she had no suspicion of what he was. He felt tense with expectation of her surprise, he felt tense with the coming exercise of his will and power. He must make his opportunity. If he had to leave with Clifford he would manage to say to her: "I am coming back." If she would not see him he would wait outside her door; in the wild spirit of adventure of which he was capable he would think nothing of waiting all night. He must see her alone, soon. He thought he would die if he should not succeed in doing that. His passion was sudden and complete.

"Here, don't you think so hard," she said, turning on him suddenly, "or you'll injure that brain of yours."

But he had nothing to answer.

Clifford lay back in his chair, his long legs stretched in front of him: he was listening to her, amused; but he did not give her anything special; he was lazy, half-bored, half-admiring; and as he sat there, with his indolent, smiling eyes wandering round, he gave the impression that all this was pleasant enough but did not matter; it was only something on the way. He had a slightly patronizing air with her, and Victor realized with wonder that Clifford did not feel how special, how wonderful she was. He was almost afraid that at any moment Clifford must suddenly see it and start into animation—so clear and conspicuously was her perfect attractiveness there before him, if his eyes should suddenly see. But Clifford only dawdled on there, listening to her, breaking in from time to time.

"Let's see," he interrupted once, "who is Vi?"

"Oh, she's a friend of mine that I know," said Edie. She told them a recent adventure of her friend's, how she had been almost duped by a man. Her narrative style had in it little interjections or comments which she did not pause on in the least but which were just incorporated in the text.

"She is a young silly. She made certain she was going to be married this time. He bought her a ring, don't laugh, and the wedding was to be this autumn if all went well . . ."

And so she talked on, and Clifford began to grow restless and looked at his watch.

"I shall be trotting," he said, taking advantage of a pause, making that the only answer to what she had been saying. She was absolutely unperturbed in her blitheness by the fact that this was his only reply to the anecdote she had barely finished relating to him. But Victor suddenly resented for her Clifford's casual manner, and his resentment gave him the courage to say coolly:

"I shall stay."

That made her look at him with a little grimace of astonishment.

"He's sure of a welcome?" said the girl sarcastically to Clifford in an interrogative voice, inviting him to agree.

"Oh, Victor—" said Clifford vaguely. "Victor's all right; you'll get on splendidly with——"

He was chiefly absorbed in his own departure, to keep an interesting engagement. He just remembered the two he was leaving sufficiently to amuse himself by turning at the door to say:

"He's a dangerous man." He lifted his stick and pointed it at Victor. "Yes, Edie, look out, he's abominably dangerous."

The idea of Victor's being dangerous amused him.

iii

The girl looked at Victor. She saw a thin, rather long face, almost overweighted by the thick, straggling hair, but then underneath the half-covered forehead there was beauty somewhere lurking, shy, defiant—and suddenly it became clear, the beauty, in the eyes set

true and deep under his low, straight brows, eyes that in colour were strong dark-blue, that could look both tender and wild, as it were behind their colour. His eyes were deep-set and his hair fell low down to them, and they were found suddenly, like wild flowers, and they turned all his face into beauty.

Then she saw how he looked at her, his passion and his will in his face. Her heart gave a faint leap of astonishment as he became important to her, this man whom she had overlooked.

She felt embarrassed and had to say something.

"Fancy you saying 'I'll stay!'—just like that. Why, you quite took my breath away."

He came and stood in front of her and looked down.

"Did I take your breath away?" he said.

"Absolutely altogether," she said mockingly.

"I'm glad." He paused for a moment. "I—I—I'm going to again, often."

She glanced up to his intense eyes.

"What are you standing for?" she said. "You don't need to be asked to sit, do you? Judging from you a minute ago, I should say you don't usually wait for an invitation."

He bent over her, and his curious, direct intensity made her spirit suddenly fall before him. She saw the tempestuous power in his face, and as she looked wonderingly into the dark-blue eyes the strong beauty of their gaze was clear to her and wonderful. She felt weak with submission.

"Now go away," she protested warningly.

He had every artifice of easy love-making. Inside he was one great triumph and exultation.

A little later he sat away from her. He felt deeply elated. It seemed as if no remorse was coming to him after these kisses; he felt free from the approach of it, and as he was used to the misery of remorse coming quickly, this was a very splendid freedom.

He did not know why he felt no remorse: it was because he wanted her as he had never wanted anyone before, and the kisses had been so little.

He sat down, happy. Edie seemed to have to go through a little reconcilement with her dignity, but she still remained blithe and cool, and the reconciliation was easily effected.

"Well, I suppose I must be in a funny mood," she said—"anyone I've only known for an hour! It isn't like me, either. Sometimes I'm *frightfully* reserved, and not a word or a smile can anyone draw out of me. . . ."

He hardly listened while she described for her own satisfaction a character aloof, difficult, reticent to a fault, calling it hers. Instead, he was taking a keen delight in watching her, in becoming utterly familiar with every line and play of this face that a short time ago he had looked at with the eyes of strangeness instead of familiarity. He filled himself with her brightness, he learned thoroughly the movement of her lips and eyes. With his keen perception he had a knowledge of her face that other people might not have had in years: he learnt so quickly that with him the joy of discovery and the joy of familiarity were like one joy. Already he knew her expressions so well that he waited for them.

She had lit the gas and drawn the curtain across the window. But still he felt he could not go; she was too newly found; it seemed like a terrible risk to leave her. Having got his deep impression of her, almost unconsciously he was taking in her room too. And all the time she talked in her blithe way, her face bright with beauty, the delicate white and pink of her skin radiant beneath the gas. She told him so many things, as if she must empty her brain for him. She always made her little interjections in the middle without a pause.

"Only this morning I read in the newspaper," she

said, " how at this rate we shall soon be having lady-lawyers and lady-doctors Mother! Help! and lady-managers, and lady-politicians which is more. It's a sign of the times, I suppose. Still I don't think you can always believe everything you read in the newspapers. Don't you think so? "

And he was noticing all her surroundings, and everything he saw was a delight to him, an extension of her, something more that he took into his passion. He noticed every bit of the cheap furniture, possessing himself of it all, as he was possessing himself of her. What was ugly he took to himself with a kind of generosity or charity that was an aching pleasure. The room was small and grew very warm; it was unpleasingly full of stuffs, with its carpet, curtains, thick tablecloth, and stuff overmantel; and its walls were a mass of hanging things. The grate had been turned into a bouquet of paper flowers. Suspended over the gas there hung a round tin shade to prevent the ceiling from blackening—which, however, it had not altogether succeeded in doing; all the evening this thing swung slightly in the heat.

And Victor sat on, dreading to leave it all, dreading to be without her.

Before he left he kissed her again, and he went home more than ever elated. He had no remorse, for remorse came when desire was satisfied, and in this case it had not been satisfied; he wanted her now and all the time.

All night he lay awake, thinking of her. It was a dark night, and as he lay in bed he could know only by the physical movement of his lids whether his eyes were open or closed, so entirely the same was the darkness either way. All undisturbed his thought of her beat in his brain through the long, dense night that seemed endless, or at the end seemed only a minute of thought.

CHAPTER XI

i

For anything else except his passion there was neither room nor time. He saw her again almost at once, and again, and again. And when he was not with her his mind was fixed on her, going over her beauty and her blind submission to him, exploring her circumstances, accustoming himself to his daring need of her.

For there was nothing strong enough to hold him back. His religion, the religion of his mind and impulse, was a strong worship of the Creator and of created things. The nearest he got to religion was when he praised God for the world He had made. Sometimes he was like a living flame of praise, rising towards God. The religion of denial was literally a torment to his mind. He knew the beauty of created things; the way he felt himself still shut off from them was a vile thing to him, which he knew could not last, because some day he must be fulfilled. But to make of that separation between himself and beauty a *religion*—that was so preposterous that in protest his religion did not concern itself with any withholding; his religion was nothing but a prayer for his own fulfilment on earth.

It was a religion that might have kept him pure, because his ideal of his fulfilment was perfect beauty and love and truth. But it was a religion that hung dangerously on his mere discernment of what *was* truth. And he had so long been denied and hungry, for so long he had been holding out open hands, that

now he was almost starved into thinking that whatever came full and lavish, like this passion, into those hands, he could close his fingers over, and come into a part of his possessions.

But he did not think in his state of fervid longing. He seemed as it were to have the full benefit of the results of lenient thought without any of the inquisitorial process of thinking. He did not think out his religion: he only availed himself of the freedom of its too-scarce prohibitions. He did not think out her life: he only felt the licence that certain incidents in her past that he knew of, now gave him to pursue his wishes. Without thinking, he felt a freedom coursing through him, felt it meeting his passion in its own course, until like a vast sea they flowed together through his being.

ii

And so one night he came home to South Mimms late. He waited for the first view of the house to see if there was still a light in any window. It was after midnight, and a moonless night. He could not see any shining window sending out a ray into the darkness, but he still hoped this was because he had not yet got the house in view. He could not remember certainly at what stage of the road it was all perfectly seen, he went on hoping that he still had not got it in view. The night was too dark for him to see its outline, and so almost up to the very door he went on hoping that he was not seeing it, that the trees growing their new Spring leaves in the dark were hiding it, that behind the shrubbery or some other obstacle his eyes would suddenly be confronted by a light. Against the idea of the house being dark he reasoned with all the hopeless defiance of a man up against cool abstract facts.

But it was all dark and still; the Spring night was thick and heavy with darkness, and the house did

not violate the heavy stillness by a single spark or by a motion anywhere. When he was at the very door he was obliged to realize it.

Victor fitted his large key into the lock and let himself in. He felt something like incredulity when he still saw the blackness within. Was the torment that was besieging him to have him at its mercy in utter solitude? His slight body made nervous movements of fear as he passed through the dark hall—a long shiver, a sudden stopping, and a sharp turn of his head to listen. He thought remorse like this had never been before, that it would break his body to pieces.

"I'll do anything to make up," he kept thinking, as if for a bribe, to fend off something; "I'll make up all the rest of my life," but his heart fell down as if it could fall for ever.

Often Jimmy stayed in the library till after midnight, but to-night he had gone to bed. Victor stood still on the stairs, bound to think of a plan in his extremity. Should he go and wake Jimmy and ask for a cigarette? He might be willing to talk; almost an hour might be passed in that way in the calm solid comfort of Jimmy's presence—an hour off the night.

It seemed as if his heart was suddenly almost breaking with hope as he thought: "I might say to him that I'm in trouble, and that a talk about anything, if he doesn't mind—" But then he knew he could not say that to Jimmy.

Just then, as he stood on the stairs, he heard a slight noise above him, and light came flickering faintly about. He could not yet see the approaching source of light; he only saw giant ghostly shadows creeping about him, the banister passing along the walls, the stairs gliding over the ceiling, the furniture travelling in black shapes silently, until the still-unseen light in its approach seemed to have set the whole ghostly world moving on some great noiseless enterprise.

Suddenly the light came into view at the top of the stairs. All the dark flight of shadows paused at the instant in the middle of their travelling; each shadow struck a grotesque attitude and stayed in it.

"*Who's that?*" said Victor loudly and hoarsely to the figure who stood there.

"Hush!" said his mother.

"Oh, it's you." He paused a moment. "Halloa," he said ordinarily.

"I came to see if it was you. I'm glad you've come in."

"Where's Jimmy?" he asked. Seeing his mother made him hope for one moment that Jimmy was still out.

"In bed," she said. She spoke in a whisper, glancing at Jimmy's door.

It terrified him that she should speak in a whisper. He wanted everything to be awake and loud.

"I didn't know you'd be so late," said Mrs. Carmichael as he came up and stood beside her.

"No."

"You might let me know," she went on, dwelling heavily on the words.

"I c-c-can't always let you know," he said irritably.

"You ought to try and tell me beforehand," she said.

"If I don't know myself——"

"You should try to tell me," she repeated.

But they both knew that his not having told her was not what troubled her. That was what they might talk about, but it was the fact itself, not his silence about it, that weighed her down.

And he did not want to argue with her, to score off her. He spoke irritably but reluctantly, hating to be antagonistic. How should he be antagonistic, trying to score points, when he was at the mercy of every kind of fear, utterly come to grief! He did not want dissension with her, he only wanted her humanity, her presence.

" Well, it's all right now I've come," he said.

But his mother seemed to gain nothing.

" It's a warm night," he said, to keep her.

" Yes, dear, it's warm." Her face looked tired and old, older than he had ever seen it before. There was remorse clutching at his heart, now tightening, now loosening.

He realized that he could not go to Jimmy, that he must make the most of these few minutes' conversation with his mother. He stood helpless in their common silence, his old inability for ready speech telling against him now, when he wanted to speak to her to keep her. Any word or sentence that he could think of, he wanted to put between him and his immediate past, anything to remove it by the tiniest span, but there seemed to be nothing. Anything, too, any word or delay or distraction which could hold off the immediate future, he longed for, but again there was nothing.

His mother drew her dressing-gown round her and made a little movement as if she would go. She said, hesitating :

" This world—it isn't everything."

Always she seemed to have to tell him that.

He said : " No, mother," his heart breaking with compunction.

She started to walk down the passage, he beside her. As she moved with the light, he saw the world of shadows behind them take up their great silent business again.

iii

He tried not to go back to Edie Cumming, but he went. He would, as it were, repent of his own repentance, repudiate it. Even a few hours after he had been in the thrall of it he would so far have recovered as to be unable to recall the poignancy of the remorse ; he would deny to himself that it had been so bad.

It is in any case impossible to recall pain, and he made use of this fact to doubt it. And he went back again and again.

He had discovered immediately that he did not love her. He did not say a single word of love to her. There was only silence. If he had spoken to her he would have had to remember who she was. But he did not remember who she was. She was anyone, she was an extension of himself, his satisfaction. While he was near her she was blotted out, and he was aware only of his own feelings. Sometimes if she gave a cough or moved he was startled and puzzled. Who was she, with a voice and movement of her own? He hated to remember her.

He knew the disgrace of their silence, that they had to be silent. Afterwards, when he realized the silence there had been, it gave to words a great dignity, that they had been dumb, had not defiled themselves, however willing deeds had been to do so.

And he knew also the disgrace of their abruptness. For as soon as she was on the other side of the room, looking for something there, everything was so finished that it would have been distasteful to him even to touch her hand accidentally if he had helped her in whatever she was doing—and in a kind of lethargy he left her to do everything alone. When she left his side they neither of them lingered in any tenderness, but fell apart immediately, almost with aversion. He knew his disgrace, it was heavy on him, but she was blithe and indifferent.

Within a minute of holding her to him, he would be so finished with her that his only thought would be for himself and what he should do now. He had a wild longing to be distracted immediately, to be changed and translated from this self to another self. If only there were some book which he could be reading at once which would astonish and absorb him; if only he could be quickly in some field with

the dew shining under the moon, worshipping all that he saw—such sharp imaginations would come to him of what he wished he were doing at once, things that would carry him far away on some wholesome, clean absorption. He had sudden clear visions of places where he would be. There was a little hollow of a field that he knew not far from South Mimms. It would come into his mind, with an exact impression of the fall of the ground, of the elm that sheltered it, and the sweet, small security of the green hollow. Or sometimes it was some picture in the National Gallery that would come sharply to his mind, and he longed to be standing before it at this moment—a man of self-respect he would be then. These visions came arbitrarily, in flashes, very clear; he did not conjure anything up, it just flashed on him; and whatever it was, it seemed the one and only thing in the world that would restore and cleanse him.

And then suddenly he would come back to things as they were here in the little room. And it seemed incredible that he should still be surrounded by the circumstances of his hateful impulse—after his mind had been carrying him on some far, eager escape from it. But here he was still closed in with it. He felt he could die of this closeness. In silence he made ready to leave her.

iv

At home, in the intervals between seeing her, he was too miserable to be idle, but too restless and confused to find himself new work. In this mood the books in the library were just right for him. They were an occupation, but not exacting. Sometimes he stood for hours in the library, lost in interest. He grew to have a passion for title-pages; he studied with new intelligence the different types. He learnt a great deal more about the books, making discoveries

about dates and editions, until this kind of knowledge was greatly developed in him.

Though this as work was good enough for him now, it was another question if to others it was good enough. He tried to impress his mother and Jimmy with a sense of his labour. Jimmy shunned the subject, thereby making known his scorn. And his mother fretted with impatience of him. She wanted him settled to industry, not dawdling into the library at eleven o'clock in the morning.

And sometimes he was too wretched and unsettled even for the books, and went about idly. Then his mother in exasperation told him to do things for her.

"Will you please water the plants outside," she would say sharply.

And he was always pleased and willing, and made the most of it. He did it very thoroughly and well, anxious to please her, and he felt happier.

He would offer himself to her.

"Shall I go down to the shops for you, mother?" he asked.

"Yes, I want some things fetched in at once," she said exactingly.

And he always did it very well, and brought home something extra for her. But she hardened her heart. And when she saw that to do these things made him happy, that they actually gave him a sense of sufficient work and usefulness, with which he was satisfied, and that they made him think he was pleasing to her, then she withdrew from him any chance of serving her: she did everything herself. If what she intended as a sharp rebuke was to be turned into a pleasant bond of intimacy between them, then it must stop, because that was not what she had meant.

CHAPTER XII

i

But all this did not make a great change in his life. All this—his relations with Edie and at home—was only the exaggeration of what had been before. The change was when he and Edie became friends.

She was sometimes ill, and was cheerful about it, with an occasional undercurrent of gloom. She often went to the doctor.

"I said, 'I'm a walking chemist-shop,'" she told Victor. "He said, 'I don't disbelieve you; we'd better set you up as a drug-store.' I said, 'I tell you one thing, I'd let them go cheap.' We often laugh . . ."

She got some satisfaction out of everything, even her bad times, and if she were resentful it could not last long with her. The next day she would be better, blithe and gay again, her radiant brightness shining out on him. The first feeling which he ever had for her, which was not just his unworthy passion, came to him one day when he found her ill.

"I feel more dead than alive," she said. "You'd better clear off."

"You can't be ill," he said. "You look too bright."

"It's not my looks, it's how I feel," she said peevishly.

He felt a rush of pity for her in her rare irritation.

"Perhaps you'll be better to-morrow," he said, his pity showing through his words.

"Perhaps," she said. "Or perhaps not."

But generally she was well, and the hours they

spent together in their early days just flew in one absorption, while they were together. She did not even think of anything she ought to be doing. He grew to know more of her habits, how she shirked work, how she left her letters unanswered, and put off tidying her room. If he were coming, and while he was with her, she let everything slide.

As his eagerness gradually subsided, they spoke a little more.

"What on earth!" she said. "Look at these feathers flying all about the place. That's that hole in that cushion, and I never get a moment in the day to put a stitch in it."

He saw her lying back warm and lazy.

"Then you'd better get up early in the mornings and do some sewing before breakfast," he said, with the longing he often had to think of her and of himself as early and active and hardy, for a contrast, when he hated their idle loitering together.

"Yes, I daresay," she said mockingly. "In my dreams!"

She was so perfectly contented to let things slip. She did not, like him, have a violent reaction from their lethargic hours, when at the end of them he would look up discontentedly and catch sight of the things from her meal still on the table, and dust dulling all the surfaces. They would talk about it.

His passion had been dumb, quite dumb. Then his pity, more real, had spoken to her first. And now his dissatisfaction, also real, spoke next.

"Well, it does look awful in here," he said rudely.

"Does it? Who told you?" she said.

For a moment, as she turned her bright whimsical look on him, he only wanted to take that brightness to himself again. But his discontent was stronger.

"You never exert yourself to make it nice," he said. "Why can't you stir yourself? If I were you I'd k-k-keep——"

"You. Oh, yes. You'd stand on your head on the ceiling, I don't doubt," she said in her scornful indifference.

She never waited for him to get out his words. Most people waited, looking round the room, or watching his own innocent waiting face, but she did not. She broke in; and his look would pass, lost, drifting, bewildered from his face, without the words being said.

And the less they were passionate and the more they spoke, the more there grew a bond between them of curious liking and dependence. The passion subsided for periods, and made way for something gradual and real, a friendship which as far as it went was of absolute intimacy. They had no pretensions or conventions with each other. It became a fixed part of his life, to be with her.

Things about her life she had told him in a proud intimate way, but they lived hardly at all in the past or in the future of their joint life. Their kind of relation did not make them want to join up their pasts or to bind their futures together. Those remained detached, each belonging to each. But, entirely unaffected, he had learnt that two or three times she had loved and been loved: she told him with a curious, confident pride of justification. Her case had been special—nothing to do with ordinary viciousness, about which she still believed she had strict notions. And so she had, in a way, in her degree. Often in her rambling accounts of people to Victor she would say with upright scorn of someone: "She's not at all a nice kind of girl." Or of someone else she would say: "There's not much love lost between me and her. She's an actress don't you believe a word of it. It isn't right, that way of going on."

She was idle now, but had done various forms of work, especially dressmaking. She had also been in

a photographer's studio, and had twice been in a chorus. She and Victor now had a common purse. Occasionally she received a little money from a well-to-do married sister, but she also used Victor's money. Or sometimes, when he had spent too carelessly and had hardly anything left, only by taking from her what she had could he just gathered together enough money to pay for their dinner or their cab.

"Notes or gold?" she always asked him, as she opened her scanty little purse to fumble among its sixpences.

ii

Though he might be satisfied with her for many hours of these present days, he never now for a moment confused her with his own ultimate satisfaction and fulfilment. All the time he was with her he never relaxed in his eager searching soul the watchfulness he kept on life, to acquire, always to acquire. She had nothing to do with all that was going to be in future for him. They were really so little to each other compared to what there was in life—there was only their little friendship; but what there was between them was of a perfect certain genuineness, and held them both. But even while he was with her he had not the faintest semblance of completion with her. His dark blue eyes wandered in the street while she talked to him; his dark blue eyes, with their half-hidden sweetness, wandered and penetrated and stared and wandered again, and all the passers-by he encountered with his eyes.

Being with her was better than being at home, more painless. After he left her, the sense of her would still be with him, for about half the way home. Then at a certain stage of his journey north in the tram he would, as it were, pass a middle line, and be not so much leaving her as going home, and he would become slightly uneasy.

Once from a little distance he saw his brother waiting at a stopping-place, and get on to a tram, and so pass out of sight. Victor stopped still in the street when he saw him; something prevented him from approaching. He had just come from Edie, and still felt her near. When he saw Jimmy he stood still and something seemed to break his heart with tenderness at this sudden sight of his brother. He looked lonely, and upright, and there was a narrowness of purpose as he climbed on the tram to go home; he looked young and strong and serious and yet old in the narrow monotony of what he did: at any rate a sense of pathos came to Victor merely to see Jimmy there complacent and dull, making his journey, and he adored him in his soul.

He reached home not long after him. He was always guilty coming home, and wanted quickly to conciliate them, to ingratiate himself.

For always lurking in his mind there was a great doubt. Was *their* way of life the fullest after all? Did they contain all fulness in their very exclusions and in their tightness? Were not his own experiences the narrowest deadliest things in the world, deathly with sordidness? He had denied himself no experiment, and yet he knew that he had not for one moment had the joy that he sought. He knew how his intimacy with Edie, in spite of all that it had been to him, had made him say to himself: Is that all, is that all! with dismay at the little life had given him in this case when he had asked for everything. Was fulfilment not beyond experience, but on this side of it? Could a little tight world be large in ecstasy? He suffered under this doubt—it was against every instinct and impulse that he had.

But it made him come home always with a kind of humble, irritable longing to be one with them.

"Shall I fold those up for you, mother?" he asked. She had been airing sheets in the kitchen.

"No, I can do it myself," she said.

"I don't mind doing some," he said again.

"No, that's not a man's work," she said.

"Damn," he said under his breath.

And Jimmy had washed and changed his shoes and lit a cigarette in the library, doing everything as he always did it, Daisy following him like a shadow. Victor wandered in there. Jimmy talked to his dog and played with her, and Victor sat by ignored.

He had come back into their tight little world, and in a way his heart ached with loving it. But if he knew anything he knew that it could never hold him and his life. He was sure that he must go out to find something, everything. With his very soul he must be searching always, not merely a search for amusement, but for the very cause of being. He saw this clearly as he sat in the library, up and down which the dog raced with legs which had hardly started before they had to be drawing themselves in to stop, the paws scratching on the polished floor at the edges of the room. Through the open door he saw his mother pass along the hall once or twice with bundles of linen over her arm; she looked down as she walked. His heart ached for her.

And Edie was at least something outside.

iii

That was a Spring of vivid darks and lights, when the sun came out in such glaring colourless light that the eyes ached against it. Then came a day when the sky was low and grey, and suddenly vivid green showed up under the grey sky, which had not been so vivid in the sun. There was full green in the parks and on the trees in the streets, and watering cans darkened the roads under the lowering sky that yet would not rain, and red roses were hawking in the streets in tired piles. Oh, then it was Summer,

They went out a great deal, they used hansoms freely, and Edie's smart light dress, which she took a week to make working all day in her room, came out very bright and successful. Its blue colour showed up that day in Hyde Park, that soft, leaden Summer day, when the green was strong and vivid under the heavy sky. They were happy that June day.

There was a wet Autumn, and Victor was upset in his health. Like a flash the horror of death blotted out every hope he had of the world. There came on his face a worn look, not so much from his illness as from his fear. Sometimes Edie had him sitting there in her room for hours, unable to leave her, clinging to her for company and reassurance, wanting nothing else of her. It was a death-blow to what passion there was in her, but it brought out all her kindness for him. He kept for her ears alone the tale of his illness. He always fought shy of confidences at home. He felt that confidences at home are somehow so permanent and important, they are apt to perpetuate mere moods. He kept his fears from his mother with the vague feeling that if he told her he would have, as it were, to live with those fears for ever, to be committed to them. So when he felt ill he went in abject nervousness to Edie Cumming; he hurried to her on this account as much as he had ever hurried in his passion. How dead their passion then was between them. His urgency now forced on them both the memory of his urgency then. It was a strange likeness, a strange difference.

Edie used a kind of gay banter with him.

He knew the names of various affections, and their symptoms. He kept a sharp look-out.

"Edie," he said one day when he was ill, "I've got an aneurism." The dead certainty had come to him.

She did not know what he had. At this moment he looked ghastly enough for anything. But she only gave him a bright grimace.

"Help!" she said. "What's this you've got?"

"An aneurism. It's when the heart becomes abn-n-n-normally——"

"So have I," she said. "I've got a shocking one."

Another day he said: "I know what's wrong; I know what I've got—syncope." He was white.

"How much?"

He repeated it, not so absolutely positive when he said it again.

"Only one?" she mocked. "Poor thing!"

The feeblest banter would bring to him for some minutes a gleam of hope, in that touch and go of panic.

She made him go to a doctor. They both never forgot the day they went, she going with him to the door and then waiting at a tea-shop near. When he came at last he told her that he was sound, that he had merely a nervous trouble of digestion. He was in a quiet ecstasy. They had dinner out and went to a theatre that evening.

The cloud had been over them for a long time. Gradually she recovered from it. One day when she expected him she felt a new longing for him to come. All memory of the weariness and anxiety vanished, and she felt as she used to feel in the early days. She dressed herself in her new dress, her careless random methods producing as usual an effect of perfect finish and smartness.

While she was dressing he arrived, early. She thought he must have the same impulse as she had. She called from one room to the other, telling him to wait in the sitting-room; she wanted to come to him finished. Ten minutes later she came, looking very pretty, her bright face softening a little from its coldness.

He tried to meet her in the same way, yet hoped she would see through the pretence. For his one desire was for her to know the return of his fears. And as he kissed her she felt the backward thought. Every-

thing had come back: the doctor had not properly understood his symptoms, he had new ones which he had not told; besides, doctors make mistakes. She had all her impulse turned back sharply on herself, hurting her.

When he was actually suffering Edie did not banter him, but looked after him instead. This was a chilly, wet day in early October. She closed the window and lit a fire. She felt wonderfully separate from him, as if all distance were between them, after what she had expected. There was only her pity and his need, that was all there was. She made him lie down and gave him some tea. She had an odd, muddled way of doing household things, whimsically amused at her own efforts. "What on earth!" she exclaimed frequently. She was a little surprised when the fire burned well.

He lay in a kind of lulled, oblivious peace, her desultory conversation just pleasantly jogging his mind.

"Clifford was round yesterday," she said.

"Was he?"

"He's a nice child," she said indulgently.

He almost dozed.

The bell rang and she went quickly downstairs. After some minutes she was back, and he, too lazy to speak, glanced at her in half-inquiry. Her face was flushed and determined, as if some conflict was in her.

"Who was it?" he asked quickly.

"A friend of mine I used to know."

"Man or woman?"

"Man, if you want to know."

"What did he want?"

"Heavens, what a curiosity! To go out on the razzle."

"Edie, did you want to go?"

"*No*," she said scornfully, with her determined look.

"Why not? You *did!*" he said.

"Well, he does understand giving you a good time, if it comes to that," she said, weakening for a moment. "But I didn't *want* to go."

He said nothing, but deep in his heart he felt how she had denied herself for him. He seemed to lie enveloped in her cool tenderness.

Afterwards she sat low on the floor by the fire. She had a packet of letters, which she read over one by one. He was peaceful and she could forget him. Her attitude was beautiful with the crouching of her thin, delicate body; she hung over the letters as if her whole body were musing on them.

When he had dozed a little he woke up, and his pain was quite gone. She was reading the letters. He watched her.

"Edie, whom are they from?" he asked.

She started; she had forgotten him.

"They're from a friend of mine that I know," she said with her unvarying formula. "They're from Imogen Rendel."

"Clifford's sister?"

"Yes, she is."

"I remember a little girl."

"Of course, I've got every line she ever wrote to me," said Edie.

"Is she nice?"

"She *is* nice," she said almost sharply. She seemed there with those letters to be curiously sharp with affection.

"Every line," she went on. "Young Vi came round here a few weeks ago when these were laid out. She said: 'Fancy keeping letters! What a lot of rubbish lumbering up the place!'" She fell on a sharp silence, as if that were enough.

"Oh. What did you say?"

"I turned round and gave her a complimentary answer. My word, I told that girl off. 'Letters!'

she said." Edie imitated her mincingly. "'You should be like me and burn them.' Yes, I should think she *would* burn them. So would I—the letters she gets."

"Are those nice letters?" said Victor.

For a moment she did not answer.

"I love them," she said, her face glowing. "If anything goes a bit wrong I only want to have a look at these and it's right again. You can read one if you like," she added.

She passed him a letter.

With one arm he propped himself up on the couch drawn across in front of the fire. As he took the letter he looked at Edie and their eyes met. He gave her a shy look which she knew well. She could see in the firelight the pale, rather long face, with deep blue eyes fixed on her, and colourless hair struggling over his forehead, and she saw the curious mixed shame and joy on his face, and she knew it and knew that he was better.

"So it wasn't your very last moments on this earth after all, it seems," she said. She smiled at him. She liked his face like that.

He still only looked at her, joyfully.

"Thinking you're going to quit this life!" she said disparagingly, but he could feel her forgiveness.

He had to read some of her letters. But now he was better he wanted to be up and out. He read quickly the small handwriting.

7 Colonnade, Bristol.

Dear Edith.—Miss Sterne asks me to write and say that she hopes you will endeavour to attend more regularly at the club in future. It is Miss Sterne's earnest desire that the members should make every effort to be regular, in order that the work may be carried on successfully.

Do you mind my asking, have you got the pattern of

that blouse you wore last time but one? I never saw anything so sweet.

Yours sincerely,
Imogen Rendel.

7 Colonnade, Bristol.

Dear Edith.—It is very sad that you are in such trouble. No, I won't tell Miss Sterne, or anyone at all. How I wish I could help you. Isn't this weather dreadful? I feel quite dull; I do wish you were here with me to-day.

Yours,
Imogen Rendel.

7 Colonnade, Bristol.

Dear Edie.—Come again to-morrow and spend the day. My brother may be in, but that won't matter. If we finish the blouse, we can start on some new material I have got. It is very good of you to help me. I thought of the new princess shape. Do you think that would suit me?

Yours,
Imogen Rendel.

Not one of them was anything more than that. He wondered at her pride in them. They were old letters, but for her their freshness and beauty had survived time.

"And money!" said Edie. "I was down on my luck at the time, but I didn't have to want for money."

That Winter Victor was better, but in the next early Spring he was ill again. One day when Edie was herself going to her own doctor, she made Victor come as well. She had done what she could, but when he no longer listened to her she thought it was time the doctor should be re-introduced.

"Come on," she said. "You come with me this

afternoon. What you want is the doctor touch again; nothing else is going to do you a bit of good. I've had nearly enough of you sitting there counting how many times your heart beats in the inside of a quarter of a second."

So he went to the new doctor, and saw him after Edie. They came out into the street together. She turned her face on him quickly. It was a cold white day, and her warm colour and bright, dewy eyes were beautiful and close to him.

"Well?" she asked.

"I'm sound," he said. Again he had his ecstasy. He thought: "I have loved the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth." How he loved life and the prospect of living! And now that it was given back to him he felt his heart open to it with an almost unbearable sensitiveness. He could hardly endure the beauty; he hardly dared look at Edie's face because he saw it so beautiful. He thought, "It is like being born again; and it is too quick; children come to knowledge slowly . . ." He walked in ecstasy. If his mother could have seen him she would have brooded over him, and come out heavily with "This life isn't all . . ." or some such phrase. Together they went walking through the white shining afternoon.

"What did I tell you!" said Edie. "But there, it's not a bit of use me speaking. I don't know anything, of *course*." She had not been able to scold him lately because she had been infected with his own doubts—so she made up for it now.

And then suddenly, after they had walked some way and come into Hyde Park, he turned on her.

"Edie—what about you!"

"Murder!" she said. "Don't look at me as though I was a corpse."

"Why did you go? What did he say?"

"Oh, he and me! We're disgraceful, we have to

meet. We're always indulging in each other's society," she said, mocking blithely.

"What did he say?"

"He says I'm not much better than I was six months ago! Don't swoon! And not likely to be."

He stood still and they faced each other on the grass. She felt his shame and his pity surrounding her as he blindly felt for her hand and held it. She did not want him to have shame and pity; she only looked tenderly mocking.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I'm not dead yet."

He looked at her with his expressive dark eyes shining with feeling, unable to look away. And his look was as she had known it before. For even all pressing in among the pity and the shame there was his own new, unquenchable ecstasy.

CHAPTER XIII

i

In the midst of all the opening-up of the district—the planning and measuring and building and increase of population—the perfect pastoral aspect of the dairy company's fields became only more marked. The trams lumbered close by along the road, and rows of little red houses in one place crept up to its very edge; and on another side by the Great Northern Station a coal-merchant had spread his premises until his black yards came into proximity with the dairy's grass; but the neat, luxuriant pasturage was still a feast to the eyes, incredibly verdant, rising picturesquely as a landscape should, with a few rich elms spreading here and there.

And behind, the fields merged into the waste of Scrutton Grounds, fortunately just hidden from view by the rise of the green fields. From the road the fields narrowly contrived to make a horizon against the sky. But it was a near thing. The land dropped only barely sufficiently where Scrutton Grounds began; it was a question of inches simply, as far as the important view from the road was concerned. And Scrutton Grounds would have made a deplorable horizon. As it was, the horizon was particularly prized by the dairy company; it was an asset which they had never actually valued in pounds, shillings, and pence, but had they done so it would have been at a high price. For now, from the road their fields seemed to roll away north into infinity, suggesting that their cows had more or less the run of an England rich in grass.

And then beyond Scrutton Grounds the development had again been brisk and wide. London had spread herself thickly here; and to have the same kind of surroundings as they used to have, the Carmichaels would have had to move themselves another three miles out from town, and then only for a very temporary benefit.

Talk of a new railway line had been mildly agitating the residents for many years now. Generally the spread of London to a new district is induced and encouraged by a convenient railway service. But in this case the development had outstripped the enterprise of the railway companies. The development had spread far from the railway station, and the need for something new was urgent. The trains landing passengers at King's Cross suited only a very small part of the people who wanted to get into town; and the trams, carrying to different parts of London, were too slow.

And now at last something was to be done.

When the Carmichaels heard what was to be done Jimmy and his mother looked at each other in blank dismay. With all her heart she would have protected him from what hurt him where he was most vulnerable. All she could do was to put herself on his side, to think with him, to let him feel how one they were in resentment.

All the time Jimmy had been uneasy at the changes that took place round him. He was a man who was likely to save himself from worrying over what could not be prevented. But especially during the last few years, as he went backwards and forwards from the house, he was perpetually feeling some new dissatisfaction, because what he had seen yesterday was changed to-day. But he had at any rate felt consoled by the inviolability of his own immediate home. It stood fixed in its character; and from the library Jimmy still looked out on to the changeless dark shrubs and

semicircular drive; and from his bedroom above he still looked on to the familiar waste of Scrutton Grounds across the road, and beyond to the peaceful cow-haunted fields.

On the evening when they knew that the new station was to be built immediately opposite to them on Scrutton Grounds, Jimmy and his mother went out for a walk. It was a Spring evening, and a light cold wind seemed to blow the sky extra bright, just when it should be growing dusk. They wandered a long way. She hated his worried expression. She was now fifty-five years old, strong and spare, and her face was aged in a few strong lines. She walked along looking down, but if Jimmy passed in front of her, her eyes lifted for a moment to the figure she loved, and she felt awed by what was going on in him.

He took her a long way, with an unconscious motive. They went as far as some marshy fields beyond the streets and houses. They left all signs of town behind and were nursed in the marshy hollow. A bird sang in the evening, and while it was still light the dusk filtered in between them and whatever they looked at —as if it was not everywhere but only just between them and what they looked at.

And to be here seemed to give point to Jimmy's resentment. Among the streets and houses he could not so easily execrate the railway; it would have been a little difficult to stand upon Scrutton Grounds and lament the destruction of its beauties. But here he could stand and say to his mother: "They don't care what they spoil. They'll get a few people into town five minutes quicker than before."

And suddenly as they walked they came to a field full of strange things. A small traction-engine stood in the field with a dray attached to it, and on the ground lay a pile of wood and iron. They guessed at once that the railway must be coming through

where they now stood. Jimmy walked on, feeling intensely uneasy. He felt that something that had been fixed in his life was being wrenched from him. He felt absolutely baffled in his obstinacy, and he could not understand or contemplate life otherwise than as he planned it and was accustomed to it. He was upset and surprised and sullen.

They came to a clump of primroses. They were the first they had seen this year, and Jimmy picked them. They were pale and cold; he put them to his face, but they were very cold and smelt not so much of themselves as of the marsh. He knew he was hurt right through; as he was picking the cold primroses he knew that he was hurt as he had never been before. Here was something he could not evade. He knew they would leave their house.

ii

Mrs. Carmichael, knowing his mind, declared that before the very first sign of the building of the station came they would pack up and leave. While they were still in the early stages of their discussion as to where they should go, they woke up one morning to find the building commenced.

From their windows Victor watched, fascinated. To see the spades at work on Scrutton Grounds, probing its mysterious soil, laying bare the secrets that it had kept! It was violation to penetrate that strange soil. It had buried many things, but now the merciless spades missed nothing. And all Scrutton Grounds' ambition in the way of grass and dandelions made one heap with its more disgraceful parts.

The work progressed at great speed at the hands of a large number of men. Adjoining the station more houses were being built, one job being made of it all. Warm Summer weather came in, but Mrs. Carmichael kept all her windows shut. Dust filtered in like a

miracle through the closed windows, and the noise was hardly kept at bay. Only by degrees they learnt that the way to unload iron girders is at a given point to let them fall, one on another. They fell with a noise like thunder at their very gate, but thunder that was, as it were, not perfectly neutral in sound, having somewhere in it the musical ring of the contact of metal. Each time a girder was unloaded it sounded as if something fatal had occurred. The Carmichaels would sit motionless holding their breath during the great ringing clamour of sound and then rush to the window, and see nothing but the red studded girders lying harmless amidst the quiet, unmoved progress of the work.

And Victor was excited by it all. He stood endlessly at the window watching, fascinated by the setting-up of the yellow brick walls, the spanning of the girders. He loved the clamour of life when the different noises were sounding together—the thin tin sound of the breaking of the bricks with a trowel, the perpetual busy hammering of wood. So he stood there endlessly at the window.

"I say," he said, "they're stuck."

He was always saying less than was necessary for his meaning. And they did not ask him.

"I mean the wheels," he said; "they're rolling in a great girder on wheels." He wanted Jimmy to come to the window.

"Lord, how they push," he said. "And they won't do it: the ground's too soft. I say, you should come and look."

"By Jove, I believe they'll do it!" he said in a minute.

Jimmy strolled to the window, and Victor loved him to come, loved drawing him in. And Jimmy grew interested.

Always Victor felt it a great prize, a great victory, if he drew Jimmy into an interest. Jimmy's cold

detachment often had a moral justification; it was an indifferent distaste for Victor's idleness and bad habits; but, however righteous, it could be broken down, Victor knew. In spite of himself Jimmy would find himself in some sudden bond of interest with Victor. Victor was his oldest habit, and to Jimmy that was the strongest, the only bond. They spent most evenings, when Victor was at home, over the books, but about all Victor's daylight hours spent with the books Jimmy was coldly uninterested. He had a great power of producing an uneasiness by the simplest possible means—a withholding silence. And not even his mother, who knew him well, knew quite how little this silence cost him—no anger, no volition, no expense of feeling. He did not even have to attend to his own silence or to think about it, though the others had to attend to it so minutely.

But one day Victor brought him two books, open.

"Look at this," he said.

It was afternoon still. Jimmy had come in tired from real work. He hardly raised his eyes.

"It's those two copies of Donne, b-b-both incomplete."

Jimmy still hardly looked.

"I can make one—" his eyes and his gesture spoke instead of more words as he held out the books.

"What, one perfect copy?" said Jimmy keenly.

"Look," said Victor, putting them in front of him.

"I say, this is rather good," said Jimmy, turning over the pages. His passive face brightened very attractively. "No, wait a bit, you can't do this page —yes you can, though. Well, this is rather marvellous, considering there wasn't so much left of either of them."

And to have brought him thus from his coldness made something glow in Victor's heart. All day he had a dream of finding a folio Shakespeare behind a shelf in the library, and of going to Jimmy where he

sat unexpectant and slightly unfavourable, and laying it before him. That was all, but it was perfect—it ended on that sufficient perfect climax.

So they had their bonds which in spite of Jimmy's aloofness never grew less. If anything happened they had the strong instinct to take it to each other. Mrs. Carmichael had long been familiar with " Where's Jimmy ? " It had always been in her ears. But also she knew the less familiar " Where's Victor ? "

And others—Clifford and Bayliss and Irvine—wanted Jimmy, too, wanted to be with him. They felt the safety, the strong charm of his aloofness. They all felt an odd mixture of contempt and strong attraction. When Clifford and Victor were bent on some experience they almost despised Jimmy for his narrow content and indifference. When they had gone through their experience, and Clifford had gained little and Victor nothing, they came back to Jimmy, wondering at him, how he knew the emptiness of things. However sure Victor was that he must lead a full seeking life, he was almost equally sure that his life must always include Jimmy, that Jimmy was in some way an alternative.

And in the same way Bayliss might despise Jimmy for his imperturbable silence when he set a social question raging in the room, tearing his brain over it, always seeing one truth conflicting against another truth, until he was reduced to despair by his doubts. And then he, too, would suddenly see Jimmy's indifference with a kind of wonder, as if it were a wise thing after all, as much on the yonder side of argument as on this side of it.

And being with Jimmy was not just dull.

Sometimes when Clifford and Bayliss came in the evening they all sat round the table and played a gambling game. Mrs. Carmichael would not play, though it was she who spread the long-shaped cloth of an unnatural green, which was meant to look like

turf, and set the four little tin horses, whose front legs stretched so far forward and their back legs so far behind in the exigencies of a gallop, that the whole horse was almost flat on the verdant cloth, the jockey leaning stiffly forward in perfect composure. Mrs. Carmichael set the horses very straight and ready, making a little fuss in her heart over it. She loved the men there together, waiting for her to make it ready.

And Jimmy had wild improbable luck at the game, from which he derived a quiet, curiously attractive amusement.

Sometimes they dined together in town. One evening when it was very fine Jimmy and Victor drove all the way in a taxi into town. They liked doing it, and they liked doing it together, and when they joined the others at the restaurant they continued to be more conscious of each other than of the rest of the party. They spoke of the drive.

"We had to look about for a taxi," said Jimmy. "Victor, of course, distinguished himself by hailing a private motor-car." He liked, when he was enjoying himself, to make Victor a little ridiculous. And Victor gave a low repressed laugh at himself, very willing. He caught up the wine list; he always chose the wine, very knowing and eager about it.

They were at a small Italian restaurant, experimenting there. Clifford got into a state of great disgust; he had wanted the Criterion. One of the things brought to them they could not eat. Clifford called the waiter.

"Take this away," he said in his drawl; "it isn't nice."

"Aren't you sorry?" said Bayliss facetiously to the waiter.

"I'm very surprised," said the waiter hesitating.

"His first emotion," Clifford announced, "was one of surprise. We must give him time."

But Jimmy obstinately insisted on liking the food,

and would not change. The others were indignant—it seemed to weaken their case. Clifford grew quite heated about it, but the only thing that seemed to count there at that table was Jimmy's complacent, blind obstinacy.

Victor looked at him.

" B-blackleg ! " he said.

Jimmy half-smiled, and Victor glowed at the smallest contact of their sympathies. When Jimmy was with them he never needed to be wild : having Jimmy did instead of that. In everything Jimmy had a curious, contained, negative importance. And all the time he and Victor were a little more concerned with each other than with the rest, with, as it were, a side intercourse between them. Victor was anxious Jimmy should imitate his way of eating an orange : he was always wanting to initiate Jimmy away from his own indifferent habits.

" You miss the juice your way," he said to Jimmy.

Jimmy glanced at Victor's own performance.

" I don't wash in it, if that's what you mean," he said derisively.

Afterwards at a music hall they were all conscious of him, of whether he were enjoying himself or not. But Jimmy could enjoy a joke about Victor more than the best joke on the stage. It was curious how little he wanted things from outside. He liked slightly to mock Victor, or to speak about his business, making it absurd. No impersonal joke could satisfy him so much as that.

Yes, it meant so much to Victor to be with Jimmy. It was almost enough. But it was not enough.

iii

It was not *enough*, and so he betook himself here and there, and sometimes at some grand experience he felt he was adding to his soul, or sometimes he sank

merely to a low, sensual grasp. He loved painting and sculpture and architecture, and knew just where the best of these things were to be found. His mind was widening fast. He went abroad with Jimmy and they found what was best in France and Italy, Victor's judgment always leading. He came back with his capability of ecstasy in regard to life even heightened. And there was not fulfilment anywhere.

When he woke in the morning he would feel always a kind of curiosity and expectancy. There in the darkened room he would feel a strange importance in waking. It did not get him out of bed; he was slothful in the morning; he lay and luxuriated about it.

This morning he would be lying, perhaps, at the top of the house in a large, plain attic-room into which his mother had moved him. She still carried out drastic changes in the household as long as they did not touch Jimmy. She turned a bedroom into a sitting-room and moved heavy furniture about with intent will, still managing in some way to be doing it for Jimmy. And then generally she could contrive that Jimmy knew nothing of it.

So Victor, waking in the attic-room, looked into a large interior darkness. The window was draped with such heavy curtains that it might have been night outside still. But for one thing. Down the short chimney came a shaft of steely light—grey, sharp light on the blacklead and the hearthstone.

What kind of a day was it? Unknown day! That steely light committed the day to nothing at all. It was mere stark light; it said not a word as to the colour and sensation of the day. Only a few feet of chimney, and the day, whatever it was, was above. But the light that came down the chimney was stark bare light, that would be the same on a thousand mornings of wind or rain or sun.

In an hour he got out of bed and went, an untidy ruffled figure, across the floor to the window, and

pulled the curtain. The glorious morning shocked him into joy. But oh, the need to relate it to something, to something that would happen to *him*. There it was, sunny, still, gathering heat, a day shining with beauty, made to be the setting to happiness. So somewhere he must find happiness to have and to be his on this day. But where?

The pain and desolation of that "where" lasted him only for a minute as he stood by the window. There was a great aching need and a great hope in him as he asked it, a void that wanted to be filled with utmost fulfilment. His very body seemed to hollow itself out—he felt himself sinking in, to be in a shape to hold, to receive. But as he had nothing glorious to pour into himself, and he had to put something, he began at once to fill that void with names and thoughts and plans—far from what he needed, but still things with possibilities. Clifford and Edie came into his head; he thought of Regent Street and a crowd of people, and cabs and tea-shops. Yes, something would happen to-day.

Down below him the men had been at work for some hours. He looked down. From this higher window the swarming men were diminished in size; they seemed to have become merged into the earth, and it was as though the earth itself were moving; it was like an ant-heap. Victor walked lazily back across the floor. For all that the day held he could still wait. He had a very developed habit of slothfulness, which could make anything urgent in him stay while he lay, negative. He laid himself down on the bed again, and time passed.

Later in the day he was in Edie's room. First he had visited Clifford. The red motor had stood at the door of Clifford's rooms off the Haymarket, and they had entered it together. Clifford had suggested taking out two girls, Edie and another. And first they had called for the other girl, Jennie Lord.

Now Victor had been sent up to fetch Edie, while the other two waited in the car below. Victor was in a fever of hurry. He felt utterly out of patience with Edie for her unreadiness. The door between her bedroom and her sitting-room was open, and her belongings seemed to have wandered impartially through, so that she roamed about airily, humming a little tune, in a slow search for the various things she wanted to make her ready. Victor helped her with feverish willingness, but hers was a blithe, indifferent slowness on which it was not possible to impose hurry. She would not even realize that he was in a hurry. He had to fasten something behind for her. She felt his quick hand hastening over it, and at the end he gave her a little angry push away.

"Here!" she cried in her high mocking voice. "You mustn't be so affectionate, it isn't right."

"Make haste then, Edie," he said more gently.

She was putting on her best things, pleased to be going out. She was making herself very magnificent, and it was a marvel how an effect so faultless and smart could be produced by such random methods as hers.

He turned on her suddenly.

"Can't you make haste!" he cried.

"Listen to him! I should like to know where the hurry is!"

He went to the window and looked down, but he could see only the houses opposite and half the road in the afternoon sun.

"Oh, now I see where the land lays," said Edie. "I'm catching on. It's you and Vi Porter all over again."

He did not answer, not caring whether she knew or not.

"Do you remember you and young Vi the first time you saw her? So now it's young Jennie Lord, don't blush! Well, don't be nervous; they won't run away. I shan't be many minutes now." She con-

tinued to talk as she wandered between the rooms looking for her shoes.

"She's all right—Jennie. Well, she's a good sight better than some. She's on the stage; Lord isn't her real name. She's got this father of hers she had to turn round and keep, this Mr. ——. What's the man's name! What *is* that man's name?" She passed into the bedroom but her voice came through. "I'm sure he *had* a name. What *was* it they called that man by the name of!"

She began to sing again, and all the time she was gradually doing things. In ten minutes she was almost ready to go down, but still she would not be hurried.

"You're the slowest—" Victor began angrily.

"Am I?" she cried indignantly. "Who told you?"

Victor's heart beat with excitement as he saw Jennie Lord again. He thrilled when her large bright blue eyes glanced at him. They talked and laughed about how they should sit, and discussed their individual requirements of space. This was kept up while Clifford was driving them quickly through the streets.

"You might say I was thin to look at my face," said Edie. "But there's not much thinness about *me*. I think features can be very surprising, very."

"Yes," said Jennie, "very deceiving, as the saying goes."

She had a silly, affected manner, rather fawning on Edie, who, as Jennie Lord grew more affectionate, slightly exaggerated the usual mocking coldness of her manner. She seemed very cool and direct compared to Jennie, who spoke in a stagy voice and was perpetually showing her teeth in a wide, pretty smile.

And Victor sat beside her and made her aware of him in his bold, insistent way. He had started the day in such preparedness, and in the very first moment of seeing her her beauty had seemed to be the thing—

not answering to his need, for nothing ever did that, but a substitute full of a kind of panic of excitement. And so the hours sped in her company as the motor carried them along summer roads, as they sat out of doors at tea with the Buckinghamshire Thames below them studded with boats and a throng of gay people sitting round, and as late at night they were still spinning along the roads, Edie in front with Clifford now, and he with the fair girl at his side with her unchanging smile, left to themselves. And Victor kissed her.

Then immediately he began to wish to leave her. And down his heart fell in hatred and disrespect of himself. With an actual physical sensation his shame crept over him.

Jennie was dropped at her door. The good-byes were loud and gay.

"Good night, Ede," called Jennie in her affected voice, waving her hand as the car moved off.

"Good night," said Edie, and her voice and manner were always cold in contrast.

"Good night, darling," called Jennie again when the car had turned.

"Help, what a voice," Edie merely remarked.

Soon Victor left the car too.

Oh, the beauty of that summer night as he went home alone. Summer, Summer! Was Summer made for such low physical shame as this! As the day had begun in beauty, so it had ended in beauty, but he had gained nothing, had had nothing to do with it. There was only shame got out of that day for him. He went home by Dacre Lane. The full trees stood motionless in the dark.

Those were his summer days.

CHAPTER XIV

i

WHEN the Carmichaels came to face the question of moving, they made a survey not only of possible districts, but of their own financial resources, to guide them in their choice. They found that they were richer than they supposed; Mrs. Carmichael had capital whose interest she did not quite spend in the year, and Victor and Jimmy, with their independent incomes, made no call upon her. It was clear that the range of their choice need not be restricted by economy, and they embarked on their search with only their own taste to dictate to them. They had a good deal of time; but there was a limit, for Mrs. Carmichael now declared that before the first train was driven into the station they must be gone.

She and Victor were the most active in the search; Victor especially made this an opportunity to impress them at home with his enterprise. And all suggestions were discussed at breakfast or at supper.

Jimmy had a way of vetoing a thing without the slightest expense of feeling, without the trouble even of seeming to take up an attitude. So that no one could have said by just what word or tone his opinion had been conveyed. He could disarrange one whole scheme and propagate another all with a few pleasant tentative words. It was not so now only; it had always been so. Sometimes in the past Mrs. Carmichael had caught from Victor enthusiasm for some project and come with it to Jimmy.

"Shall we go to Boulogne for a month?" she would perhaps say at the beginning of the summer.

"Yes?" said Jimmy . . . "Or shall we go somewhere on the river?"

And that was enough, just that, with the depth of obstinacy there was behind. He did not consider about Boulogne; it was just that he did not see himself there. Always he must be able to see himself.

"Wouldn't it be nice to have a nice bright paper for a change?" his mother said once when the hall needed redecorating.

"Yes?" said Jimmy. "Or would you like the plain green again?"

And she agreed.

And now it was just the same in the matter of the house. When they had found something and came to tell him, they knew quickly what he thought. So that something dead came into their very descriptions. Jimmy's wonderful economy of feeling made him just reply with polite interest. He never took the trouble definitely to disagree; to get his own way, he did not even have to pay the price of an argument; he did not argue, he merely agreed; but by experience they knew from his voice and manner that his will was against them.

One evening when it was still early summer, Victor came in late for supper with news of a house. He was full of enthusiasm.

"Well, I've found something good," he said.

"Where, dear?" asked his mother.

"It's at Harrow," he said, looking at Jimmy.

"What's it like?" she went on.

"Harrow's all right, isn't it?" Victor said to Jimmy.

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy.

"Well," Victor continued with less animation, "it's an early Georgian house on the hill. It's very pretty outside, and it has a large garden. Don't you think it sounds——" He waited, doubting.

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, "very nice."

"There's an old mulberry tree in the middle of the garden, and quite a wonderful view."

"And inside?" asked his mother.

"Oh, the inside wants a certain amount d-d-doing to it," said Victor. "But it could be made p-p-p-perfect. The rooms are quite large, panelled. You must come and see. Don't you like that kind of house?"

"Oh, yes. Of course," said Jimmy.

But they knew they would not live there.

They had not only to find a new home, but to get rid of their present one, too. As weeks went by and neither thing happened, Victor sometimes felt afraid that Jimmy would never be able to make up his mind to leave. But the building opposite was proceeding at a great rate, and through the fields the line was pushing its way. So Victor searched diligently, and nearly always he took Edie with him, and they enjoyed looking together for the house. She was always ready to go out with him, and complained of her loneliness when for two or three days he had to accompany his mother instead. He came to fetch her whenever he could, and in the daily companionship their cool, close familiarity grew upon them both.

And then suddenly Edie became engrossed in a new absorption.

ii

He found her one evening all strange and mysterious. As he arrived at the top of the stairs she came out into the passage, shutting her door behind her.

"Look here, I can't come out to-night," she said.

"All right. Can't I come in?"

"No," she said, awkwardly.

"Very well Edie. Shall I come over to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" she echoed.

"Yes, and we'll go out." He saw she was only half thinking of what he said.

"Better say the next day," she suggested.

"Or next month!" he said angrily.

She came nearer to him, giving him her attention.

"Next month! *There'd* be a parting! Don't be silly. I'm very busy . . ."

She leaned on the rail of the banisters, and Victor, standing at the top of the stairs, looked into her bright, dark eyes reproachfully.

"Has anything happened, Edie?"

For a moment something seemed to blaze in her with tidings. But she hesitated, and his anger rose quickly against her.

"*Who's in there?*" he asked.

She gazed at him, half-afraid.

He took a step forward.

"You'd better tell me!"

But even in his easy anger he felt a curious shame. He had no rights over her; he had not even the right of *caring*. He had never let her feel she could count on his fidelity, and he knew the unfairness of his attitude now. As he stood threateningly in his anger, she dealt with him quickly and coolly.

"What an excitement! I've got a friend of mine in there if you want to know. But there's nothing to rave about, if you only knew it. That friend of mine that's in there—well, it's not what you think, it's——"

He saw a wonderful intensity of feeling come into her face. It made him more curious, but more ashamed. He must make her feel that she need tell him nothing; she must be perfectly free of her own joy.

"I'm sorry, Edie," he said. "I'll go off now."

"Yes, but wait a minute. Do you know who's in there?"

"Who?"

An excitement came over him because he had never seen her like this before, so kindled, so tender. Never with him had she been quite thus. She had got a treasure, and he did not know what it was.

"It's Imogen Rendel in there," she told him. "Suddenly—she came. I never thought such a thing would happen! She's a bit upset about something," she added, with a beautiful, simple compassion. "I don't know what it is, but I'll see if I can't brighten her up. I never thought she'd come all of a sudden like that. Why, I thought perhaps I should never see her again. But she came straight to me in her trouble. Poor thing! But that'll be all right soon. She's been unpacking and showing me some of her things. She's going to stay for a bit; they've given us another room."

"I see," he said. He felt shut off from the intensity of satisfaction and possession he felt she had; she was rich in her treasure that was in there behind the closed door. "Good-bye," he said, "perhaps I'd better not come soon?"

"Oh, yes; come soon. Good-bye," she said, and turned quickly from him.

He began lingeringly to go downstairs. Suddenly he stood still.

"Who was it?" he heard in a clear, eager voice as Edie opened her door.

"A friend of mine that I know, Victor Carmichael."

"Oh, I wish I had seen——"

The door closed sharply on the eager curiosity of that voice, and Victor went on his way.

When a few days later he came again and met Imogen Rendel, that almost blatant curiosity of hers produced in him a slight aversion. It too deliberately explored and questioned, ignoring everything but the immediate object of its interest; he felt defiant against it, and a little contemptuous of anything so

unguarded. Had any one the right so to scrutinize her fellow-beings, and would she herself be prepared to survive the test of such sheer unabashed curiosity if it were directed against her?

Physically, she could not quite do so, he thought in his first slight disfavour against her. For though she had beauty, and that confident un-selfconscious manner of the person who does not need to have any misgivings as to the impression she makes, yet there was also in her a failure of beauty, a queer individual ugliness or awkwardness, which it was possible suddenly to see instead of seeing her beauty. And when one saw it, it seemed the most individual part of her, the part that was most essentially herself. Her beauty was of a type old in people and in art—large brown eyes wide apart, and a pale golden skin, and the faultless oval form of face of a Raphael madonna. But over this there could come her little plain, wondering, clamorous look that was herself, only herself; and it was that look which made one think not of pictures and women long past but of the single individual woman that she was, and her individual attributes would come to one's mind—until one was whispering her very name.

If Victor, with his quick eye, discovered immediately her failure of beauty, it yet was not long before that failure was the thing he wanted in her face—what made him feel her own presence enter suddenly.

From her curiosity about him she turned to curiosity about whatever he had to offer. In her unabashed way she regarded him, so that his only resource was to feel defiant of her opinion; and from that she seemed to turn eagerly to what he might provide for her in any direction. In that first afternoon of his meeting her she made him feel how anything that was good must be produced and rallied for her. Days went by and she remained with Edie, and Edie held her there with her almost fierce, tender

affection. Not much otherwise had they in common, beyond the little practical circumstances of their living together, for Imogen had an ardent, clamorous outlook, and Edie her cool, insensitive dealings with the world. But they met in the common interests of every day, their meals, their clothes, their pleasures. "Let's take a run to the shops," said Edie, and they went out to Piccadilly and Regent Street. Or when Victor came, "Where are we going?" asked Imogen, her expectancy turned almost breathlessly upon him. And Edie existed for Imogen, not caring for anyone else. She gave up her other friends, and even Victor she now saw only in the light of what he was to Imogen.

Imogen was twenty-six, and she had an easy, experienced charm of manner which some women naturally adopt. But, besides that, there was something fine and young and helpless in her, something that she had not learnt, something that was only herself, created when she was born. Exquisitely and subtly fine, her spirit was; for to her question: Where are we going? the answer was not easy or close at hand: never could Victor have replied by a mere indiscriminate supply of excitement; she was made only for what was best. He never for one moment gave her but what was best in himself. Several times before in his life he had felt a strong pride in rising above his most customary relations with women; he had an immediate recognition of fine quality, and a strong pride in his own fineness that he could put out to meet it. He felt an exaggerated pride at the most ordinary refinements in himself, after all the wildness he had indulged in. He loved to feel himself being fine after he had been wild.

It was curious how Imogen, seeming only clamorous and eager for everything, yet never had anything offered to her but what was best. Her upright innocence created a fine atmosphere around her. And in that fine atmosphere which Imogen created,

Edie did not strike a discordant note: her strong affection was her sufficient refinement. The only person who was discordant was Imogen's own brother, Clifford.

Clifford was now thirty; he was beginning to be obsessed by money anxieties which he had long refused to allow. His way of life, though it might easily have made him a fine out-of-door, athletic man, had yet been too concerned with every kind of unfruitful pleasure; he was deteriorating, and his deterioration, not noticed before, became visible beside his sister. He was a little strange with her, for in the pursuit of his own pleasures he had for some years neglected her and knew nothing of her private life, nor why she had come to Edie. In selling his father's business he had been obliged to undertake to pay to Imogen the yearly sum which her share of the property would otherwise have yielded her. For some time Clifford, coming near the end of his money, had been faced with the necessity of finding some work to do, and there was one occasion when he nearly secured a partnership in a motor firm, but nothing happened. Now he did not know where to turn to get for Imogen even the modified payments which were all she had received from him of late. But his intense worry did not as yet pull him together; he tried to evade it in any lightness that occurred to him.

But Edie, since Imogen's advent, had adopted a sharp attitude and often she pulled him up.

One day he found her alone when Imogen and Victor were out.

"How's Vi?" he asked, as they talked together.

"Vi? Oh, I daresay she's all right."

"Haven't you seen her?"

"We don't speak quite so much now, she and I, not like we used," said Edie indifferently.

"But I liked Vi," said Clifford teasingly. "I shall look her up."

"Very well. Do." Edie spoke with cold asperity which gradually increased. "Only don't bring her round here. She's not particular enough for me. As long as that girl can get some one to take her out and give her a good time she doesn't mind who it is. Once when I met her out the man was—well, drunk, as the saying goes. I didn't say anything. I only said, 'what you're doing, you're asking for trouble, and you'll get it while you wait which is more.' But I don't want that kind round here now, if you care for the information. You and your Vi, you can——"

But Clifford laughed her silent, until again he would try and rouse her rancour, to gather any amusement for himself from the passing hours.

The two girls continued to live together, and nearly every day Victor came to them. He got into the habit of bringing them always something, fruit or flowers, or anything that he could imagine them enjoying. He thought Imogen liked the things, though he did not always know. She had, in fact, almost an ecstasy of love for the flowers. He had discovered in a shop some beautiful garden madonna lilies, and for some weeks they continued to have fresh supplies, and he went again and again to buy them. The first time he brought them, Edie took them up to Imogen in her bedroom. Imogen gave a little cry; she hung over them, seeming to take them into herself. "How beautiful, how beautiful," she said. But when she came down she forgot to give her share of thanks. She had filled herself with them and finished, and was ready for something new. It was not Imogen but Edie who said the most about the things he brought. She, as it were, overlooked everything on Imogen's behalf. She confided to him what Imogen liked.

"Now I know she likes a good cake," she said. "Let's see—I forget how it came up, but I know I heard her say that she likes a nice cake."

She always thought it necessary to try and explain how things "came up."

"Here!" she cried out to him one day when he came in, "don't you go and do the lily touch to death!—I don't know, though," she added in sudden new wonder at them; "perhaps they'll all be over soon."

"Chocolates!" she said another time, when he was doubtful if they were pleased at his bringing them. "Oh, yes, you like them, don't you, Imogen? As for me, I can go on eating chocolates till further orders."

But once when he brought a bunch of delphiniums he saw Imogen in her first love of them, and as she put her face into his flowers, his heart went faint in him.

She was beautifully dressed always, in fine, light things that gave to her appearance an air of great fastidiousness and delicacy. Round her throat she wore a small row of pearls, their subdued radiance matching her skin. Autumn came in and she wore different clothes, but the lucent pearls lay round her bare throat.

Edie helped to attend to her clothes, she touched all things of Imogen's lovingly. But though she might take care of her clothes, Edie still could not contrive to do any household things regularly or well. She was always being astonished by the exigencies of domestic detail. "What on earth!" was still often on her lips when she stood confronted by the surprises of some task. And Imogen herself seemed helpless. They lived in a muddled way with unfixed times and a disorder that they were hardly aware of. Often for their meal they depended on what Victor might chance to bring. "I'm starving," said Imogen helplessly to him. When she saw what he produced, she grew excited in her hunger; he made coffee or sometimes he cooked eggs on their fire, and she loved

that all this should have been set going in the little room—the purpose, the movement, the preparations, the smell of the coffee. She came hovering round him, helping him, doing what he did. He knew her hands so well. He knew the blue veins running over the back—delicate, broad veins running into her arm. That, anyone might see—but her hands were known to him more than that. For behind these there were other veins, as it were further away, fine as a thread, a different colour.

But then in a few minutes she would drift away, leaving it to him, her delicate outline showing against the blue evening outside as she stood and looked out of the window, waiting.

It was a fine Autumn, and Victor was up early on the cold misty mornings. He was still helping to find the house, making early expeditions in the raw mornings, while the sun was small and hard, without rays, like a little red balloon, an object like another. Then, as the day began to amass itself in colour and heat, so grew his other purpose, leading him in one direction. He could bear all the beauty of the day, nothing was too much, nothing beyond him. The beauty of the day simply came to his hands.

And as he went about, hopes and plans were hovering through his mind, and everything now seemed at hand that hitherto had been withheld. He felt master of everything, and in that mood there were many things that he wanted to take to himself. There was definite work, for instance. That was one thing which he wanted to add to himself, now when everything seemed possible; he must settle down to something steady. What could it be? He thought of his knowledge of books, and wished that some work could be found in connexion with them. Something would happen, he felt sure. In the meantime he was often very busy for Edie and Imogen, and they depended on him. He had strange intimate things

to do for them; until he came they perhaps had no fire, they were waiting for him; and he would bring order into the room when there was chaos. He could not feel that anything else mattered when there was something he could do for them. One night, when he reached home, he heard that a man who had been to look at their house had announced his intention of taking it, but by the time morning came he had forgotten even that, in his plans for attending to Imogen that day.

And still Edie mounted guard over Imogen, and though it was not in her nature to surround her with the circumstances of perfect comfort, her tenderness and care never relaxed. If she could not be systematic in her services, her cool, strong tenderness was at any rate active always on her behalf.

"You get warm," she said to Imogen one cold October night. "There's one thing, he's made up a good fire before he went."

Imogen, reading, drew near slowly, still reading as she came. She let herself slowly down into the arm-chair and lay back and stretched out her feet to the fire, and read on. Edie went upstairs and turned down her bed.

Later, when Imogen was undressing, Edie came to her door.

"Here, I warmed your nightgown," she said.

"Thank you," said Imogen. "Oh, Edie, thank you," she added as she felt the warmth.

"It didn't kill me doing it," said Edie.

CHAPTER XV

i

JIMMY one morning invited Victor to come with him that evening to inspect a flat. As Victor waited to hear more about it, he felt that old curious distrust or suspicion lest Jimmy had perhaps found the perfect thing, by one of those happy accidents of fate that seemed to attend him. Victor always felt a kind of distrust that Jimmy would happen on the best of things, even though he knew himself somehow to be more equipped to find. And when he heard where Jimmy proposed that they should live, he looked at him with slow wonder.

Victor had searched in Highgate and Kew and Pinner and Enfield and Uxbridge and many other places. Then his ever-growing passion for Nature had made him intolerant and sent him searching for a home farther afield, and on these autumn mornings he had been into Bucks and Surrey, and the distance-limit set by the fact that Jimmy had to take a daily train to town was gradually extended by Victor in his zeal for pure country, until some houses in the remoter parts of Kent were considered by him perfectly eligible. He would come with news of them to Jimmy and explain that the journey from Sevenoaks took a quite inappreciable time longer than the journey he already made every day.

"Yes . . ." said Jimmy.

But to however formidable a journey Victor might be willing to condemn Jimmy, he still even so had not got his country pure enough. In the early part of

this summer he had spent a week with Bayliss where he had been painting in Dorset, and there in a little wild bay he had learnt what he must always demand of Nature in future. And so it had not been a satisfactory business to try to unite short journeys and unspoilt country. Either Jimmy must spend an undue part of the day in the train or else Victor must sacrifice some of his ideals of rusticity. (But however he might work things out in his mind, there was always the great uncertain factor, Jimmy's decision.)

And now when Jimmy suggested a flat in the middle of London, in Mayfair, Victor suddenly knew that this was what they would do, that they would take London squarely, and be in its thickness and not futilely evading it on its outskirts. From the moment when he heard Jimmy's idea that they would live in the heart of London he immediately began to scorn the house he was at this particular period strongly advocating at Box Hill. Box Hill he saw was both suburban and a long way off. His whole attempt had been doomed to failure, but now had come Jimmy with his tentative suggestion throwing a sudden light. They went that evening to the place. Yes, here, where the few shops had small-paned bow-windows, and where Shepherd Market made a short way to Piccadilly and sent the colour of fruit and vegetables glowing into the quiet street, was where he wanted to live—here and nowhere else.

One day Clifford mentioning before Mrs. Carmichael his sister's name, she learnt that Imogen was in town, and was eager to see her. "As soon as we've moved please bring her," she said. She was now becoming secretly absorbed in the thought of moving.

And a great zeal then came upon Victor. Life was extraordinarily simple to him now. What he got from his home, what he got from outside—he no longer had to think of such distinctions: all that was past. Everything was in its perfect appointed place, and

universal was the way in which everything, as it were, lay at his hand.

The flat was taken, and the only anxiety now was for the letting of the house, for nothing had been heard of Mr. Jenner, who had announced his intention of taking it over from them.

Jimmy entirely waived all claim to an opinion on the decorating and arrangement of the flat. That he left to Victor. And Victor gave the orders. His mother watched him almost jealously. She saw that Jimmy trusted entirely to Victor in this, and she was quite dumb of all criticism when Jimmy was by, but sometimes when they were visiting the flat, if she got him alone she followed Victor about complainingly, longing to be doing it all herself, protesting against his arrangements. But if Jimmy should suddenly appear on the scene she was silent instantly.

Victor bought an " Empire " sofa from Bayliss, who, having an artist's precarious finances and being about to marry, was reorganizing his possessions on a practical basis. Mrs. Carmichael watched him put it in place.

" I don't think a settee looks anything without the armchairs," she said in her complaining but discreetly hushed voice, as she followed round in his footsteps from one thing to another.

" Don't you, mother ? "

He was in a blue shirt without a coat. He whistled all the time, absorbed, hardly making a tune with his whistling. Some of the furniture had already been moved, and in the evening after the men had gone he was shifting things here and there. The white rooms were very bright with the electric light turned on, still unshaded. Victor whistled, as it were beneath his breath; his face was brown with exposure, and his eyes looked intensely blue as if they reflected the blue of his shirt. He was only half-conscious of his mother's complaints.

" And I can't bear that table put there—really, dear, I can't."

He looked at her, suddenly smiling.

"Where, then?"

"Well, over here, or anywhere but there; there's really no sense in having it there."

He gave her a wonderful half-hour of telling him where to put things, obeying her exactly. It meant the sacrifice of his pride in the success of his own arrangement; but that did not matter. What did anyone's opinion matter compared with the pleasure she had, he thought in the new glow of happiness that was in his heart. Only, there was one to whom he could have imagined himself mentioning in the closest of all intimacy that he had given up his arrangement to please his mother. Only to one. Would he not tell her everything, and she to him, each to each?—he had a sudden almost unbearable vision of the intimacy of love. What did it hold back?—nothing. What word or confidence did it fail to receive and cherish?—none. He stood still in the room. "My wife, my wife," he thought, and it was like a fire of joy that seared him.

Everything went very slowly. It seemed on those evenings when they went home from the flat as if the only quick thing were the progress made with the station and buildings. There the firm masonry stood swept and ready, and as Mrs. Carmichael was determined not to suffer the indignity of remaining there until the trains came rushing almost in at her front door, they hurried to be gone.

ii

One Saturday afternoon the maid brought in a card. Mrs. Carmichael read aloud:

"*Miss Christian Jenner*"

"Jenner," she said. "That was Mr. Jenner who was here after the house the other day."

She went away to the drawing-room and had Miss Jenner shown in.

"My father was going to bring me to see your house," explained the visitor, "but he was called away to the country, and I came alone."

She was a plain, fair girl with a pleasant, easy manner, and as Mrs. Carmichael led her over the house, she wondered at her quiet competent questioning and comprehension. While she looked at the rooms Mrs. Carmichael looked at her. Her appearance suggested wealth, and when Mrs. Carmichael went near a window she saw two splendid horses waiting below.

"You might think some of these bedrooms rather small perhaps," she said apologetically.

"No. A good many small bedrooms is really what I want," said the girl. "I don't know," she added, "if my father explained to you that we should not be taking this house for our own use."

"No, he didn't," said Mrs. Carmichael.

"I am interested in a Home for Girls," said Miss Jenner. "Their present quarters have become too small."

"Oh . . ." said Mrs. Carmichael. "What an excellent work. You seem very young?"

"No, I am twenty-eight," said the girl. She turned her fair open face on to Mrs. Carmichael with a sudden charm of confidence. "I am interested in a good deal of work of that kind; I couldn't bear not to do anything."

"No, indeed," sighed Mrs. Carmichael. "And you've begun in time. I often wonder what I've done with my life."

They stood still at the top of the stairs talking, before they went down. Mrs. Carmichael felt strongly drawn to her, to her youthful dignity and effectiveness and success. It seemed as if she could do so much, so easily.

As they went into the library the girl hesitated, saying:

"I am afraid I shall disturb your sons."

They both came forward. They were always particularly at ease in their library; no stranger could, as it were, penetrate this stronghold of their ease and custom. It always felt like a great backing behind them. Whoever came, theirs was still the ruling atmosphere; they felt strong, as a man will always feel stronger in his own room than in another's. And Victor eagerly wanted to reassure her, at the same time noticing her with his quick experienced eye. And Jimmy, more slow, made her feel easy.

"You're not disturbing us," he said; "you mustn't think of such a thing."

It was to him she spoke; and he attended to her with his air of friendly partisanship beyond which no one ever passed with him.

"This is the library," said the girl. "My father wanted me to say—and yet I don't think I ought to trouble you."

"Please tell me what you were going to say," said Jimmy, with his friendly almost flattering curiosity.

"He said that when he gets back he would like to come here again if you will be so very kind as to let him glance at your books. He has a large collection of books himself. There's no pleasure in the world so great to him as seeing other people's libraries."

"Tell him to come at any time," said Jimmy. "I imagine he will find a good deal to interest him."

"Yes, thank you," she said; "I am sure he will. That is so kind of you."

She arranged to take the house. When she went away her impression lingered among them, the impression of her wealth and youth and her high breeding.

Ten days later the last of the delays was overcome, and the move was really to be accomplished. A cab stood outside, and Mrs. Carmichael sat in it, a look of exasperated waiting on her face. "Why *must*

some one always be last ! " she wondered in her irritated excitement, forgetting that certain natural laws would make that probable. It was already late in the day. For Bayliss had been married that day, and the business of moving had been held up while they attended his wedding.

Victor was standing outside the cab ; he, too, could hardly bear to wait. He did not think of what he was leaving behind ; all that was in front now was too bright for him to look behind.

The cab was well loaded with all the things that had not gone by any other means. And everything waited for Jimmy. The minutes went by and he still did not come. Mrs. Carmichael had caused the cab to be driven outside the drive for a start, and it waited in the road. Presently they caught sight of Jimmy coming round from the back of the house into the drive. He was walking slowly and painfully, but not in a physical sense.

" That's right, Daisy ! " called Victor. " Come on, Daisy, come on ! Come on, there's a good girl ! " he called in his pleased excitement.

But Daisy trotted unheeding at Jimmy's heels. She did not even look at Victor, but went on at her trotting repressed pace, exactly adapted to Jimmy's walk, her head down.

And Mrs. Carmichael, as she saw her son coming, forgot everything but his pain. She watched him as he drew near, suffering, sullen, aloof ; she had to stare at his unwilling exposed look of pain, and then to look away, her heart burning in her, because she dared not make a single sign of sympathy to him.

The cab started. Far away they heard a sound like a sudden wind.

" Is it wind ? " she asked, expecting them to say yes. They all listened.

" Is it wind ? " she asked again, not knowing now what they might say.

The sound drew down on them, panting, jolting, steaming. They turned the corner and did not see the first train that was making a trial trip along the line, but they heard it loud in its detail, and as they drove away they seemed to be leaving the house to its fate.

BOOK II
JIMMY

We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.—MATTHEW xi, 17

CHAPTER I

i

ONE evening Jimmy let himself in at the flat door, not particularly willing to be seen or heard. He had something to tell his mother and Victor this evening, and he felt impatient beforehand of their surprise. He had put off telling them because he disliked the little stir of surprise there would be, how they would exclaim and question him. And now that he had resolved to tell them to-night he was glad when he found his entrance had not been heard and no one came, and glad when, going into the drawing-room, he found it empty.

He turned on the light, and he was still struck each time with the prettiness and radiance of the room. They had not lived with electric light before, and he enjoyed its swift soft brilliance. He sat down on the sofa, glad to be alone. In a minute he heard a movement outside, and a slight coldness settled immediately on his face. How calmly he would tell them what he had to say!—almost forbidding any exclamations by the very recusancy of his manner. The door was pushed open, while he was prepared to be irritated even by his mother's surprise that he was already home.

It was his dog, and she came walking across the room to him, not quickly, but her tail showing her almost secret delight at having found him. He saw her walking to him slowly in her delight, her whole body swinging slightly with the movement of her tail.

"So she has found me!" he thought, and a rush of

tenderness came upon him as he put out his hand to meet her. She jumped up on him, so that he held all her great weight, her back legs pressing hard into his knees, her front legs on his chest. While he stroked her, her head was stretched away from him, to make something long for him to stroke, and her eyes grew sleepy with satisfaction. Soon she lay beside him.

For many months Jimmy's attitude at his office had been changing almost imperceptibly. He could not see himself continuing in the publishing office. And now, on the other hand, he could see himself in another rôle which was open to him. That was how change came upon him, with a perfect economy of worry or doubt. He did not suffer through dissatisfaction or impatience while he was still involved in a thing, neither did he feel himself kindling with a new ambition until the way was well open for it. But now he knew that he would have thoroughly disliked to continue in that career which had served him well enough for a time, and his mind turned keenly towards something else.

A week ago Mr. Jenner had come to the flat and spent some hours looking at the books where, in a room set apart for them, they covered the walls from the ceiling to the floor. Only Jimmy had been at home, and the hours had fled as the two men were closeted there in their preoccupation. Now for three days a letter from Mr. Jenner had lain in his pocket, and it was time for him to tell his mother what it contained.

As she and Victor came into the drawing-room his unwillingness rose in him.

"I never heard you come in," said Mrs. Carmichael, but even while she spoke she withdrew from any surprise.

And while Jimmy told her of the letter she knew well that little forbidding reluctant look upon his face. She answered to it perfectly.

"He wants someone to be his agent or librarian,"

said Jimmy, looking at Daisy while he fondled her. "He's got a famous collection of books."

"Yes," said his mother.

"I'm not sure that I don't feel rather inclined myself for a change."

"And he'd be glad to have you?" she asked.

"He appears to have some idea of that kind."

"I daresay," said his mother, "you're thinking of agreeing then."

"Well, I might possibly do so." He did not yet say how decided he was in reality; he was still guarding against any show of excitement in her. Always he had the strong tendency to strip events, to make them dull and gradual, rather than that they should raise the ordinary pitch of interest by the slightest emotion. This would sometimes appear as he read the newspaper at breakfast in the morning and his mother asked him for news.

"What's that great heading?" she would ask.

"I fancy there's been an explosion or something," he said. He did not want to hear her exclaim.

"Bad?"

"I don't know," he said inquiringly, as if he must read and find out.

"Are there many lives lost?"

"There appear to be a fair number."

"As many as fifty?"

"Oh—yes. . . ." he replied, absorbed, "I think more than that. . . ."

And gradually she knew of the disaster, with its wholesale destruction—so gradually that he had cleared the occasion of her horror, which he did not want. Then, once the emotion had safely been kept low, when the worst was known and the calm which he enforced had not been violated, then he liked to discuss in detail the explosion or whatever had occurred. Emotion having been eliminated, he then liked plenty of talk about things.

And now, as he spoke more of Mr. Jenner's offer the guarded look left his face, he no longer appeared to be thinking chiefly of Daisy, but grew interested in speaking of what lay ahead in this new plan. And his mother knew so well the subtle change—how well she knew him!—how, once he had precluded feeling, his coldness left him and he liked to discuss in his easy derisive way the details of any plan.

And Victor sat by and listened, wondering. He did not feel the envy that he would have felt a short time ago, but he had for a little while a curious puzzled sense of defeat. He could not now envy anyone in the world, because he was too full of a consciousness of joy close at hand—a consciousness that could suddenly take away his breath in a passion of astonishment and ecstasy; but still, he felt puzzled, as if something had taken an unexpected turning. He knew this was just the post that he longed for. He felt that even now it must really be meant for him.

"I suppose he saw that I had a certain amount of knowledge about the books here," said Jimmy.

And Victor wondered again how it was that this had not happened to him instead of to Jimmy, because though Jimmy might know a good deal about the books, he himself had a different, greater, knowledge. He had a deep, understanding love of literature.

"When will it be settled?" asked Mrs. Carmichael.

"I may see him to-morrow," said Jimmy. He had, in fact, an appointment with Mr. Jenner at his house in Belgrave Square, but he must always slightly modify his statements by uncertainty, to dull them.

When he came home the next evening it had all been settled. By degrees he let out to his mother and Victor circumstances of his visit—how he had got on very well with Mr. Jenner in his splendid house, a house full of collections of which the rare books were only one. The library was to be his headquarters for work, but he was not obliged to be there every day—

in fact he was to use his time according to his own discretion, and much of it would be spent in sale-rooms. His salary was to be three hundred pounds a year. They had by now identified Mr. Jenner as a Manchester manufacturer of enormous wealth. They sat up late that night talking of what had happened, with the pleased sense of a new extra interest added to their lives.

"And I think he said something about Miss Jenner wanting to come and call on you," said Jimmy as he lay on the sofa smoking.

"Well, I should like that," said Mrs. Carmichael. "I don't often take such a fancy to anyone as I took to her."

"I think they mentioned to-morrow," said Jimmy.

She was so pleased about Jimmy's new post, she kept reverting to it from a new point of view.

"And only this morning," she said, "I had a letter from your Uncle John." He was a brother who wrote to her once a year on her birthday. "He says: 'I sincerely hope Jimmy will soon be making an advance in his profession; surely it is time we heard of something of the kind.'" She read it with scorn.

"How vain are human hopes," replied Jimmy lazily, from his contentment.

She stood near him to say good night. Her life was strictly adapted to his, to his least habit, as if he were old in prerogative; yet as she looked at him she saw him still so young, as it were unbegun in his manhood; by a strange paradox there was something intensely pathetic and moving in his freedom from care. She felt all the strong nameless attraction he had which made people love him, and as she went away, remembering his boyish eyes as she had looked down at him she felt the sharp longing to keep out of them always the shadow of pain.

ii

Since they came to the flat their manner of life had slightly changed. Mrs. Carmichael had been prevailed upon to renounce the self-imposed arduous duties which had till now occupied so much of her time and strength. The very aspect of the flat, with its fresh elegance and charm, suggested something new in the way of refined leisure for her. A parlourmaid was engaged who so sternly imposed the most finished niceties of life upon them that Mrs. Carmichael had task enough in merely submitting with tact to what was unfamiliar. Very easily and naturally her two sons took to this elaboration in their way of living—as if they had been waiting for it, their mother thought with a pang.

One day when the names occurred to them at once of several people whom they should ask to visit them now that they were settled, they decided that the easiest way would be to give a party. The idea of the party seemed to centre itself round Christian Jenner, for after seeing her again Mrs. Carmichael was warm in praises of the girl who had wakened her rare affection. As they discussed what people they should invite she judged them all in relation to this girl, who with her quiet plain charm had found a way into her heart.

When, among others, Bayliss and his young wife had been decided upon, and Irvine, and Clifford and his sister, Mrs. Carmichael suggested Mrs. Fokes.

"Yes, let's have Mrs. Fokes," said Victor warmly; he felt very open-hearted towards everyone.

"She's so bright," said Mrs. Carmichael. "I think Miss Jenner might quite like her. What do you think, Jimmy?"

"Yes?" said Jimmy. "Or shall we ask her another time?"

"Yes, another time," agreed Victor. Everything he agreed to readily. He could hardly bear the secret

joy that was in him, and each suggestion appeared to him right if only because it mattered so little. Every presence would be to him infinitesimal beside one—of the presence of that one in his home he thought day and night.

When his mother wrote her notes of invitation he came and stood beside her desk.

"I can take that one for you, mother," he said.

"Imogen Rendel's?"

"Yes, I can give it to her myself."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, she's staying with a friend of Clifford's whom I know."

It was such a joy to tell this, to speak of her. His words came bursting forth; he grew pale with talking of her.

"So now you will see Clifford's sister, mother. She's not particularly tall—yet I think she looks tall; she's got brown hair, her eyes are brown; she's very beautiful. . . ." Could his mother bear to hear it—bear what he was saying? He did not know that he was saying quite ordinary things. He could hardly breathe with what he was saying. Talking of her!—it was like shedding such a light that surely his mother could hardly bear it.

And he had to go on; he could not end this joy. He was not certain what to say, but it did not matter what he said. Anything he said of her sounded the same to him, making his face damp and a white flare of joy in his mind.

"She's sure to—she'll come in a lovely dress," he went on, quite uncertain what to say, yet feeling that each word was wonderful. "She wears most beautiful things, she loves to have beautiful things of all kinds—I mean flowers and—yes, she loves flowers—and many other things——"

To speak of Imogen to his mother! Never before had he been so, as it were, effaced in joy that he did

not know how little or how much he was saying; he thought he was giving his mother an unbearably bright impression, giving her such an idea of Imogen that as she listened she must be having the same sensation of joy as he.

"I'm so glad I'm going to see her," said Mrs. Carmichael as she gathered her notes together. She was feeling a little awed at the idea of the party, and Victor's description of Imogen only sent her anxiously to her own doubts—whether she would properly entertain these people, whether she was really effectually in all things keeping in stride with her sons as she longed to do in their new interests, so that they should never feel she held them back.

iii

He still felt so strange with her; in nothing was she perfectly known; he did not know whether she liked parties or not. He only knew her eagerness, but she had that always, always, for everything. Had she been to many parties, and how much had she liked them? He wanted to know exactly. What a pain it was that he did not know everything that she had ever done. Sometimes he could hardly bear the past when they had been separate. Things she said in passing could hurt him with a sense of loss never to be pacified. "I had this dress last year," or "When I was in London before," or "Last winter was so cold" —these sentences seemed to shoot him with pain. "Where! When!" his very soul seemed to cry. "How could it be! What was I doing!"

He came to the drawing-room door; it was dark, but the firelight flickered unevenly in the room, reflected in the polished curve of the piano, and its movement repeated again in many an object in the room, and he could smell the roses faint but rich in the air. He turned on the lights; there were three

switches; he tried two without the others, tried them in various ways: at its very prettiest she must see the room; he looked sharply round, he touched things here and there, the tall yellow roses he marshalled to suit his eye. But whatever he did or thought, something ran through him—"*My darling, my darling*"—as he touched the roses, and again "*My darling, my darling*," when he turned out the lights and looked back for the last time at the room flickering in its dark rich preparedness. "*My darling, my darling*"—not as the mouth speaks, nor even as the mind thinks, but more as a heart beats on and on.

CHAPTER II

i

EDIE'S faithful passionate affection had only sharpened and increased as the days went by. Sometimes she was haunted by the idea that this arrangement could not last, that Imogen must soon go out into her own world, leaving Edie alone again. She dreaded the future without her, a future from which the one sweetness she had ever known would have vanished.

She knew well why Imogen was there—she was there simply from the determination to keep Edie from harm. But the fact that Edie had ever come to harm was a secret between them; it was not known even to Clifford. For how long would he and other friends of Imogen's allow this visit to Edie?

Edie's worship of Imogen kept her slightly abashed before her. She was not quite so fluent with her opinions since Imogen came. She did not change her manner of speech, the manner of her cool mockery, but she spoke less. Though her love for Imogen made them intimate, yet she never lost a little awe of her that she had, perhaps due to the personal misgivings of one who greatly loves.

But then if Victor and Edie chanced to be alone she would be more voluble at once; in Imogen's absence she was very ready to exert her forensic powers. She liked to comment on public affairs, and though she did not think it was worth Imogen's while to hear what she said, she gave Victor plenty of her cool, scornful soliloquies in sentences that were often muddled, but none the less sharp with her meaning.

"It's a lovely business, this House of Lords, by what it says," she remarked to him one day, when she had been looking at the paper.

"Yes," said Victor, his violent opinion ready to express itself to no matter what audience, "but the country won't stand much more of it. The country will soon show——"

"So they can for my part," she agreed.

"Blundering idiots!" said Victor.

"I put it down to the want of ignorance, don't you think so?" Edie suggested.

And then came Imogen, and such talk was not for her, somehow, not good enough in either of them; and a little shyness came over them both with her entrance.

For Victor was still awkward before Imogen, not in what he did, but in what he said. Sometimes he felt speechless before her, and the time went heavily and awkwardly, and then it was a relief to do something, to get her meal for her, to bring her a book, to take her out. He did everything for her perfectly and easily, he even did things with a beautiful kind of grace he had—a physical grace of movement, so that both she and Edie were conscious of something peculiarly rich in the atmosphere of his service. No one could have been more perfectly tuned to their life than he, in the plans and arrangements he made for them. He had a genius for suiting their most arbitrary instincts, and without him things did not succeed. Sometimes he found them a little tired and dispirited.

"What we did," explained Edie, "we went looking for that restaurant you took us to the other day, but—well, it's gone off the earth."

Alone they were frequently tired and dissatisfied. More and more he felt he could not leave them to themselves. Often when they did not know what they wanted to do, he knew for them, even against their protests—his odd sharp will forcing them for

their own sakes. He was always right. He could show them a different world for their different moods.

Sometimes he and Imogen went out alone, but generally Edie was with them, even by Victor's own persuasion. "She doesn't always want me hanging round," Edie told him jealously; "she'll get sick of the sight of me." But Victor said to her gently, "No, come along, Edie"—his love opening his heart widely to everyone, to make him less unworthy.

So he had been a great deal with them, and they depended upon him, but it was when he was active for them or with them that they were happiest; he was so quick and resourceful in his plans. But if they sat together with nothing to do but talk, then a shyness came over him, a self-consciousness over Edie, and a listlessness grew gradually in Imogen until she took up her book and read. She read quickly and eagerly.

So instinctively Victor sought the relief of activity, and left heavy nervous silences alone. But often, as he worked for them, or piloted the girls to some exhibition or theatre, he would think: "When we are silent and awkward, then we are nearest ——" his thought broke off confused, but would take itself up again. "—If we could get beyond silence, beyond speech, beyond everything, our two hearts together.... If our two hearts were just together once I could speak to her then. . . ."

When he told her about the party she was excited and full of her little by-paths of curiosity about it. Her kindled interest insisted itself, and probed and delved into all the little places where her fancy took her. Often she asked him questions about people they saw in a restaurant or theatre. "How fast they are talking!" she would perhaps say; "do you think they have been separated for a long time?" "Yes," he replied. "How long?" she would ask, her wide attentive eyes, like a child's, waiting for his version,

his imagination, as if it could be truth. "Five years, perhaps," he said, his heart leaping in him to try and say rightly for the questioning palpitating child she seemed to be, whom he must not disappoint. "Five years, that's a long time, isn't it?" she said absently, beginning to think of something else.

And now when he told her of the party and gave her his mother's note, she had her shining eyes on him while she questioned him; she wanted to draw from the occasion all that she could; she would always save her contact with things from being only perfunctory and casual by her curious insistence. "Does your mother love having it?" she asked. "Which of you thought of it first, was it your brother?" "Who decides who will be asked?" "Tell me who the people are." And he answered always a little unnaturally, in the dread of disappointing her. He did not understand yet that her questions were entirely satisfied with little answers; his mind always leapt up flaring with effort, to produce exaggerated answers—as some people slightly overdo the invention in a child's story.

When she was alone with Edie they spoke of the dress she was to wear, and until the evening of the party arrived they were both looking forward with excitement, Edie for her sake. Chiefly they were looking forward to the bright beautiful figure she would be. She had a special dress which she had never worn since her coming. She was herself so impressed with its beauty that she was deeply excited, her face looking sweet in its hope and pride.

She dressed for the party very slowly, getting late in spite of all the time she had allowed herself.

For in all her own personal habits she took a perpetual, slow, luxurious pleasure. When she went to her room each night it was to a long idle ceremony that she went. She loved to do at leisure all those things which gave her the rich regal sense of a perfection

of purity, until at last the very room, the small high lodging-house room, seemed to have become dedicated to immaculacy.

Her little room was brightly lit, and the large oval swing-glass of the old-fashioned dressing-table reflected the silver on the table and her figure as, shrouded and white, when she went to bed each night, she moved about the room. Scrupulously but with a kind of rich languor, she prepared herself for bed, all her sensation enjoying the luxury of her refinements, enjoying the fineness of her garments as they touched her, and the sense of purity that seemed to pervade the room. On these December nights she wore over her nightgown a thin white woollen jacket. Then, her hair a warm cloud about her shoulders, and her warm brown eyes shining in her face, she saw herself in the large mirror just before she got into bed. Until she put on the jacket she was cloudy, diaphanous, a spirit that one could not touch; but when she put it on she turned into something childish and intimate and close, something to be held. In her short warm woollen jacket she was suddenly accessible and tender and personal. In everything that she did the large oval mirror reflected her as she moved in the small room, and always she was conscious of the floating figure in the mirror, and if she had her back to it she would turn suddenly, half-abstracted, to see. And each time when she saw her own lambency, her shining pallor, her red lips parted, her hair like a little cloud of mystery, she felt, still half-abstracted, the quiet deep luxury of her beauty.

And then, at the end, catching sight of herself warm and confined in the little jacket she would feel her own accessibility—and, as if in her beauty she suddenly felt there might be a snare for her soul, she quickly turned out the light and got into bed, where she lay and felt the darkness like a presence.

And always in the morning Edie brought in her

breakfast, at varying times. Occasionally Imogen protested that Edie must never again make the effort which this luxury involved.

"To-morrow I'm going to get up and bring you yours," she announced. She had a very sweet voice, with an almost childish emphasis of expression. Her changing voice was able as it were to describe her quickly. The first sign of her being tired was always for her voice to grow plaintive.

"Are you?" Edie answered. "Who told you?" She paused, hardly knowing what to say strong enough in condemnation of such an idea. "If you were to do such a thing it would take me—five—solitary—years to get over it."

"You are good, Edie," said Imogen, beginning hungrily on her breakfast.

"Oh, yes," replied Edie, "much too good to live."

Edie sat on the side of the bed. It was the day of the party; they both felt expectant. But Imogen was hungry for her breakfast, and it was only with such of her attention as was left over from it that she could think or speak of the party. Edie watched her.

"Make a good breakfast," she then said tenderly.

The evening came and Imogen began her preparations, Edie hovering about her. While she looked at herself in the glass she had an expression of composed beauty; when she looked away she was less beautiful, but more peculiarly herself, her wide eyes looking anxious and wondering and her red lips just parted. She was dressed in gold, sheathed closely in the dull glow of the stuff that looked almost like armour on her slim round figure. Her bare inactive arms hung at her side.

But late as she was, Clifford was still later. She waited for him to come for her in a taxi. The car had been sold a month ago to help to retrieve Clifford's disastrous affairs. Time went on and on and he did not come.

ii

It was an exceedingly cold night. But people gathered together for the evening, with fires and light and flowers, and above all the thrill of keen life passing among them, seem to impose their own quick temperature upon the air, vivifying it. No one thought of its being cold; there was a glow of pleasure and impulse.

It was Christian's party. Her presence made itself felt persistently on account of her young self-possessed dignity. She dominated her father, and it was possible to see that he cared to be present on such an occasion as this only because she was there. She dominated her sister Theo who frequently sent little looks to her as if she were seeking her opinion on whatever she might be doing or saying. So these three brought their family atmosphere with them, and it was cool and humorous and yet tender. But it was Christian who made it what it was, especially she who made it cool and sweet. It was not difficult to entertain her; she seemed, on the contrary, herself to provide the spirit of entertainment, she met everything so readily, and was so quick to give the impression of happiness. Once her sister, who was several years younger than she, came up to her where she was talking.

"Christie, shall I play?" she whispered, slightly protesting. "Mrs. Carmichael has asked me to play."

Christie turned and looked coolly and whimsically at the young fair face.

"Of course," she said.

"But I feel so nervous."

"Oh no you don't."

There was enough real decision and certainty in her tone to carry conviction, and Theo went off more confidently to the piano. She played well, with surprising execution.

And while she played Victor stood with his back to the wall, his head bent down at first listening. His

hair was brushed back over his head in a long, fair sweep; his delicate full mouth, like a musician's, looked sad now, like a plain line of pain in his face. He waited and listened. He had thought she would come too early, by mistake! All the time beforehand he could not believe that she would not come too early, simply because it was incredible that he should not see her before nine o'clock. At any rate she would be the first; he had never for a moment thought she would not be the first to come. And now it was long past ten. He began to feel a terrible pain of apprehension that she would not come at all. His dark blue eyes swept the room; everyone was listening. To him it was like a strange incredible scene. As he had thought of it beforehand, it was always Imogen that he saw, with just a vague background of other people and flowers and lights, and now she, the essential, was missing and that vague background was in sharp reality all round him—Mr. Jenner was sitting solidly in his chair opposite, and just beside Victor young Mrs. Bayliss sat in one of her natural perfect poses that looked like a painting, and made her husband always watch her.

How Victor hated them all. For having to see all these people sitting meaninglessly round the room he would recompense himself by-and-by. He would like to do something wild, and a little gleam came into his eyes, as in the days when he and Clifford were wild together. He would not break his heart about Imogen. She was only one of the women in the world. His eyes rested less carelessly on Mrs. Bayliss where she sat low at his side. "But she is married," he thought. "Yes, yes," he thought, "but all the same . . ." Or then he considered the wine he would drink;—later, when the people had gone, he would go out. He wondered whom he would get to accompany him as Clifford was not here. He caught sight of Irvine across the room. Yes, he would come

all right. Irvine liked to drink in a stupid, moderate sort of way. When Victor grew wild Irvine would very seriously try to restrain him, and it would be amusing to see him doing that. Victor would very probably have a row with someone, and Irvine would protest earnestly and volubly. He had done so before—Victor remembered exactly how he looked, speaking fast and anxiously in a silly futile way. A slight smile crossed Victor's face. He would lead Irvine a good dance; he would make a violent stir somewhere before he went to bed that night. The music stopped. The door opened and Imogen and Clifford were shown in. Victor's heart seemed to stop beating, and his eyes looked at her with wild joy.

As Theo Jenner moved from the piano Clifford was introduced to her, and they sat down together apart. An hour later they still had not moved, but sat with their faces turned towards each other as they talked, and only occasionally she remembered to look shyly and excitedly at Christie.

The evening was growing late, and a feeling of informal enjoyment was in the air. People moved freely about, and when Mr. Jenner found himself in the library the very lines of his back as he stood facing the books were eloquent of his satisfaction. Once Victor was detained by him there for a minute while he made a remark about one of the books. As Victor answered he could not help thinking: "Now he is bound to be sorry he has not got me to work for him instead of Jimmy." But however sharp a pang of regret Mr. Jenner endured he certainly concealed it, merely putting one book back and taking out another.

"It would be curious to see what this would fetch in the Rooms," he remarked. "There's never been a copy sold that I know of."

"Yes, I don't know, I'm sure," replied Victor. He thought the very tone in which he said this must

interest Mr. Jenner. He was always exaggerating the amount of himself that he conveyed.

Jimmy got on exceedingly well with everybody. In such casual intercourse as this he was at his best, with his bright friendly interest and solicitousness and ease. Everyone to whom he spoke had the comfortable conviction that he had no other wish than to be speaking to them, and his popularity was high. And none of those little emotions of desire and disappointment which arise where young people are gathered together and meet and attract and conflict and grieve and rejoice, touched Jimmy at all. He had courtesy instead of love, and kindness instead of passion. He enjoyed the smooth casual haphazard hours, when nothing had to pass between him and others but what was perfunctory; and that was his ideal of intercourse. Then he shone with his perfect attentive manner, and there was an air of almost sleek comfort about him. He was still spare, but broad and strong, and his strength looked unused.

There was only one from whom in the whole course of the evening he kept away as much as he could, as if he did not even see her—and that was Imogen. Directly she came in he had taken an impression of her, the impression she gave to everyone, with her unconscious clamorous look. And Jimmy avoided her instinctively, shutting her out.

But to everyone else she made the centre of interest as far as the eye was concerned. She spoke very little as usual, but men stood around her, waiting for what she might say. There was something momentous about her as she sat there in her beauty. She looked at once voluptuous and innocent, and she had a fascination that kept people's eyes upon her.

And each minute Victor's pride and love increased. This evening was going to begin a change in his relations with her. He was a man whose strong impulses had never been used to stop short of deeds,

and it was a marvel how all these weeks he had worshipped her timorously and passively. He never would again.

As the guests went from one room to another he guided her into the library which was now empty, Christie having insisted that her father should not bury himself with the books, but should eat and drink and be sociable. As Victor took Imogen in, the sense of her beauty imprisoned there with him overcame him. He led her to the window. How slow she was! Would she never cross the room? He parted the heavy curtains and they fell about them.

"Imogen!" he said. "I love you!"

He did not look at her; he was very pale, he felt overcome with the intensity of this sweetness or pain that pierced his heart. He must ease it on her breast, and in a moment he took her in his arms. His will was hard, and though his words had sounded at once difficult and sudden, impelled yet not what he necessarily would have chosen, his kiss was long and hard and certain, his whole life was in his kiss.

When at last he saw her face he saw that she looked shocked, but also he saw that something in her was appeased. He felt his tongue was freed because he had been heart to heart with her. He spoke slowly, with pauses.

"Imogen, do you know how much I love you? If I hadn't kissed you then, that moment, I couldn't have lived. You can't understand yet—wait, my darling and you will see. It isn't ordinary love, this. Do you feel what you have done to me? I have been waiting for you. I love differently from others—yes, I can love. Oh my beloved, my life, believe me. You will see."

She lifted her beautiful glowing face and smiled faintly, but at once she seemed to be passing back to condemnation; he saw as if from a distance the strict offended look she was going to assume. He wanted

to laugh at her because she was so wonderful. He pulled her gently away, as if he were pulling her away from the possibility of rebuking him.

Theo was asked to play again. At the end when she got up from the piano she hesitated as to where she should sit. Clifford was standing just where she had left him in the spot where they had been together since Clifford came. He stood waiting, with his eyes fixed on her. She was very young and still shy and conscious, and began to move away as if she knew that it is generally right to go where one does not want to go. But suddenly she turned impulsively and went back to Clifford.

At the end of the evening just before the party broke up a little group stood apart. Imogen and Christian had been talking together, and Christian felt a great interest in the girl who unconsciously called for protection; to Christian's strong cool character Imogen made a great appeal. As Christian seemed to be thinking of going, Theo joined her with Clifford, and Jimmy was standing near. These young people who had met newly to-night were conscious of a liking for each other and of the necessity to meet again. Between Imogen and Christian arrangements were being made, in which Theo and Clifford included themselves by their pleased looks. They lingered together, talking; and conspicuous among them was Jimmy, important in his absolute ease and light-heartedness, more perfectly in his element than anyone else, beeause this was how he was satisfied to pass through life always; he was not seeking for anything beyond.

"Will you also have tea with us on Thursday?" Christie asked him.

"I shall be at a rather important sale on Thursday," he replied, "but I will come on if I possibly can. I shall hope very much to come," he said in his attractive way.

But Theo pounced down on him impetuously.

"I don't believe he minds in the very *least* whether he ever comes to see us or not," she suddenly challenged him with smiling intimacy. "Now, honestly, will you mind if you can't come to our party on Thursday?"

"I'll only break my heart," replied Jimmy, in the same tone. "But of course that won't matter to you."

As she continued to challenge him and he to reply, little sounds of laughter rose up from them as they all stood together.

A cousin of the Carmichaels joined them to say good-bye. He was a small beaming man, smiling and stout with prosperity.

"Well you don't look a day older than when I saw you five years ago," he said to Jimmy as he shook hands. "How do you manage to keep so young?"

"Blameless life," suggested Jimmy. Again they laughed at him, drawn on all the time to like him more and more for his young, boyish good humour, yet finding him ultimately so separate and detached. And Victor, standing by, gave his special pleased laugh.

Downstairs, long after midnight, Victor stood in the street on the spot from which Imogen had just driven away. In the lamplight the roads looked pallid with cold and hard as iron. For a minute after she left everything was breathlessly still. Then a cat, an old fighting cat with dusty scarred face and tattered ears, went by and rubbed itself against him as it passed. He saw it trotting briskly across the road, with its beautiful trot, jerking with lightness; its front legs went out stiffly and straightly in front of it, blurred with its silent speed. And in the next street there was a sharp footstep ringing quickly on the pavement.

O these little manifestations of life! Beauty and ugliness could not matter to him anything in his

exultation. Only just the fact of *life*. Even its most trivial manifestations sent joy surging through him. He thought of Imogen in her gold dress, close to him in the library, her shadowy hair, her soft alluring face. He knew he was capable of a love that would never die, that ordinary rules of custom would not dull this passion; that as he had always loved the world more strongly than most men, so there would still be something untamed and wild and elemental even in the very love with which he would love her when she was old.

And now she was young.

CHAPTER III

i

NOTHING could exceed the gloom in which Clifford sat hour after hour the next day at the Carmichaels'.

"Things are bound to take a turn," said Mrs. Carmichael pityingly. He had always been a strong favourite with her. "You don't look like one beaten," she added.

"I'm beaten if I go to Canada," he said. "Once I set foot in that cursed place you'll hear no more of me. I shan't be writing descriptive letters home every mail—not exactly!" he said bitterly. "To think that a man can sit at home and send me out to that——"

"And who has?" she asked.

He explained. His aunt, who used to indulge him was dead, and a cousin who was much older than Clifford had her money, and had continued to help him from time to time. Now he would pay Clifford's debts for the last time, and only on condition that he broke from this present way of life by going to Canada.

"Is *that* all he can offer?" cried Mrs. Carmichael indignantly.

"I might go to him this instant and swear I'd never waste another penny, and promise not to rest day or night till I'd got something to do here—and do you suppose that would make any difference?"

"Not a bit of it!" agreed Mrs. Carmichael angrily. She was always ready with her violent indignant partisanship.

"I might say I had a particular reason for wanting to stay, of the greatest importance——"

"And you might as well talk to a stone," she said, so strongly on his side that it almost disconcerted Clifford.

"If I told him there was a reason why I couldn't fail to change everything," he said earnestly, "he wouldn't listen, just because he's made up his mind not to."

"Men of that kind, when they've made up their minds, they think—well, they think something's happened!" she said sarcastically.

"Of course I know he's done a lot for me," said Clifford. He felt uneasily that perhaps Mrs. Carmichael was not being perfectly just. He turned to Jimmy, miserably. "What would you do? Would you go to Canada?"

"I?" said Jimmy. He could hardly help smiling at the idea. "I confess I can't quite see myself going to Canada," he said, almost enjoying saying the word "Canada." He lay back in his chair with his sleek look of comfort.

"My God, what am I to do?" Clifford sprang up, a look of pain and hopelessness on his face.

"I shouldn't trouble if I were you," said Jimmy nervously.

"I'm ruined!" said Clifford. "You don't any of you know how bad it is——"

A look of intense uneasiness came over Jimmy.

"Well I shouldn't worry—" he began. He got up, looking round. He was embarrassed with hatred of the scene; he turned over the pages of an illustrated paper, looking at it with a tense, puzzled look.

Clifford sank into despairing silence.

"We'll have dinner soon," said Mrs. Carmichael.—"What a cold night!—we must all keep warm. Put some coal on, dear."

Victor got up at once from the dark corner where

he had been sitting and put the coal on, and went back to his place.

It was to his mother and to Jimmy that Clifford had been unburdening himself, not to him. He and Clifford had been companions for years now. But their bond had been the bond of their weaknesses, not of their strength—how quickly such a bond is empty and broken immediately anything real arises! Victor knew that in spite of all their companionship Clifford did not think of him now, but turned where he felt there was steadfast quality. And Victor sat unresentful, knowing it was right this should be so. Not from his past did he expect anything fine or worthy to emerge. His whole being looked to his future, to contain everything. It would almost have disconcerted him at this time to have had anything fine coming out of his past, so full he was of the sense of all good being to come. He felt the utter suitability of Clifford's indifference to him now.

So Clifford talked on, as if it were his last gloomy luxury, and they must know everything, however bad. And so at last he had told them about Imogen. And then, though Mrs. Carmichael had been waiting anxiously for all their sakes for the announcement of dinner, she still sat there after it was ready, pondering about Imogen, shocked that all this should fall on the girl too.

When Clifford left soon after dinner, Victor went out to Imogen, and Jimmy and his mother sat on by the fire. The atmosphere was still heavy with Clifford's hopelessness. On Jimmy's face the uneasy look lingered. At last he said, looking up from his book:

"Do you think he seemed depressed?"

Even she, knowing him so well, was surprised that he could make it out so little as that.

"Yes, I do," she said.

"But he'll soon get over it," said Jimmy, and she, to spare him his tense, unwilling pain, agreed.

ii

And certainly it did seem afterwards as if Jimmy were right. Whatever the doom that awaited him Clifford did at any rate succeed in banishing the fear of it for a few weeks. During those weeks there was a constant succession of occasions when he could be with the Jenners; he could take them out, or meet them at various places, and they had frequent dinner-parties.

Christie had conducted the household entirely ever since her mother's death five years ago. From the first she had done it well, and now it was a system that almost conducted itself. She was a girl for whom people worked well; her cool manner took so much for granted that it would have needed real imagination to be a lax servant to her. She was so full of activities herself that she was obliged to rely strictly on other people to do their part.

She would come in fifteen minutes before dinner from some Committee or some Home that she visited in the suburbs, and while she dressed she gave a few directions, and just in time she appeared downstairs, where her father and Theo were watching for her. She was always even and lighthearted.

Clifford was constantly with them; just for a few weeks he ignored the fate that was hanging over him; he could not resist this forgetfulness, nor the allurement of that household. And Imogen was often there too. Christie was fascinated by her; she wanted to know her more and more. Though she seemed to Christie to contain already all richness and beauty, yet also some appeal in her made Christie want to bestow everything upon her.

Jimmy also took very kindly to social life. The superficial intercourse suited him extraordinarily well and it was clear that as he grew old he would indulge in it more and more. Most of his time was spent in

the library in Belgrave Square, but not then did he see so much of Christie and Theo. Sometimes when a door opened in the distance he heard the sound of the quick sedulous notes of Theo's piano, which would stop with a strange incredible suddenness—oh in the middle, so much in the very *middle*—but it was stopping only for him because that distant door had been shut again.

Or close outside in the great hall he heard steps, and the bell, and he thought of Christie going and coming, and considered all the good she was doing, and admired her for it. He began to have a deep respect for her. And what gave a special incentive to his interest was that Christie, that quiet, determined girl, so young, so slight, so unpretentious, was now the owner of the house that he loved. Jimmy was not the person to lose sight of that fact, of any fact connected with the house at South Mimms. He could not discard the habit of a lifetime, nor was that his wish. How he had planted his very being in that place where he lived !—and he and the old house were still one. He was not sure that he ever wanted to see it again in its spoliation, and yet it was a kind of fascination to him to think of Christie going there. Very often when he saw her he said: "Have you been to South Mimms lately ?" Or: "I suppose you manage to get out to South Mimms only very rarely"; and she soon learnt to expect the question from him, and it came always, hardly varying. She realized that he had to say it, that it released some feeling in him, and that she stood for him as someone a little apart from all others as being the one person to whom he could address that remark: "Have you been to South Mimms lately ?"

iii

While Clifford lived on for a little while in forgetfulness, Imogen began to realize that she had hardly any money. She was aggrieved. But even while

she learnt of it she did not dwell upon the whole misfortune that Clifford's extravagance meant to her life: she did not resent it on a complete scale. Only when she wanted to buy something and found she had no money, then just to the extent that she was disappointed of the dress, or the hat, or the lunch in town with Edie, did she feel aggrieved against Clifford.

"I never knew Clifford would do that," she said to Edie, dismayed. Then, according to her scrupulous code of belief in the bearing of injuries, she made a simple act of forgiveness of him in her heart.

Edie resented her loss for her, and yet she sometimes exulted to think that Imogen was nearer to her, was not so likely now to leave her as suddenly as she had come, to go away and live in a house full of servants, where Edie would be hopelessly out of place. Edie was afraid of servants.

They soon discovered that the financial outlook was very unpromising, and they began to grow careful. Their economies were very spasmodic and partial; each one had a strong intention in regard to herself, but both of them grew fretful and impatient to see the other practising economy. Edie was the first to fall into a nervous, fretful state of mind when Imogen began to eat less. She watched her at meals at home, and pounced down crossly on her if she detected the slightest decrease in Imogen's consumption.

"Here!" she would cry shrilly in protest. "Don't you eat so much! I can't afford the expense!" She was deeply hurt.

And then, as Edie was often not well, Imogen worried over her abstentions and felt baffled when she could not persuade her against her will. They nearly quarrelled.

To ease this strain they would soon go out, and as economy was such a perturbing thing their next meal would be gay and expensive.

Into this state of things came Christie.

o

Ever since she could remember, she had had more money to spend than anyone else she ever met, and this fact had done something to her. She was only twenty-eight, but when she was with other girls she had some little nameless advantage—very much like what age might have given her if she had been older than they. Her very perfection of tact made her a little apart: there must be a reason for such tact as that. And so her wealth made itself felt in her. And she herself never forgot its possibilities.

She took in quietly the circumstance of Imogen and Edie Cumming being together, and the suspicion in Edie's eyes when her visits were repeated again and again. One day she asked Imogen simply: "Why do you live here with Edie?"

Imogen paused. She had a shy, ardent liking for Christie, and wanted to answer everything she asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I had to leave where I was—I had to. Then everything I thought of seemed so dull—— But I had often been thinking of Edie, I was unhappy about her. She was so pretty and full of life, but she was so weak and helpless too. And suddenly I thought I would come to her and help her. I felt it would be something for me to do. It was a power given into my hands because, of course, she was very fond of me," she ended.

"Yes, how fond she is of you."

"Yes, and then you don't know how I dreaded its being just something dull—my coming away, I mean. It was difficult to come away, but I had to come in order to avoid temptation. It's a dreadful thing to say, but I longed to stay! Oh, how I longed to stay! I have some relations I could have gone to, but that would have been just dull, terrible. It had to be an adventure, do you understand. . . ."

Her soft lips as she spoke were impossible not to watch.

"Yes," said Christie, "I think I understand." She

kissed that beautiful face, as if she would like to kiss it into peace.

Another thing for Christie to notice and consider was Edie's occasional illness. She came often to see them, but not too often, respecting Edie's feelings. So in regard to those two she stood vigilant but a little apart, like a guardian angel, waiting her opportunity.

iv

More weeks went by, and Clifford continued to hold off his doom and to lose himself in fervent happiness. Often he thought: one day more and everything is over—and then out of very pity for himself he postponed the day; he felt that not only his happiness was at stake, but when he took a long look at Theo, it seemed as if he must lose his very soul in going.

As robust as ever, he towered over everyone, and from the even light red colour of his face, his blue eyes looked lazily and good-temperedly. His troubles had played no havoc with his great frame, beside which Theo looked like a quick, elusive fairy. The only outward change in him was a new awkwardness or shyness when he came into Theo's presence—and no friend of his had ever seen that awkwardness in him before. He would laugh too readily and have nothing to say, and look ashamed and awkward in his great strength, just because Theo had come into the room.

At the Jenners' he sometimes met his sister, and even in regard to her, painful thoughts were put aside just for this brief time—swallowed up in the pride he felt in her because she was beautiful and admired. He met also Victor and Jimmy there, and if at first it was an embarrassment to encounter them in cheerful circumstances after his despairing confidences to them, a little time can dull any embarrassment or surprise, and after two or three times of meeting it seemed

natural to them all, so quickly do the most unexpected things form their own accepted precedent.

He knew he must go, and soon. But by his delay he was preparing the way for at any rate one change in the circumstances of his departure. By now it was certain that Clifford would not go silently, but would make one despairing statement of his love first.

So the winter was passing, and at the Jenners' house and the Carmichaels' flat they all met together. When she was with them Mrs. Carmichael was pleased but slightly strained, never sure that they did not feel her separate and disconcerting. One thing prevented her sensitiveness from brooding on this misgiving, and that was that Christian, the strong central figure of all these young people, was her great friend. She was very proud of that.

But often she stayed alone at home. When they came back if she was still up she wanted to hear everything, she loved the details. Her two sons came in and stood at the fire, Victor abstracted, his thoughts far away, and Jimmy reserved—while she sat waiting for what she might hear.

"Was it very nice?" she asked.

"It went off all right, I suppose," said Jimmy.

"You stayed late."

"Yes. No one seemed to make a move."

He gave her the impression that it had been dull. He made things dull in his account of them; that was the one impression that it was easy to him to give. Having given that, gradually he began to say more, to be interested himself in telling. Then by degrees all the little details would come out from them both for the mother's ears. She only had to wait, with now and then a question.

"Was it an amusing dinner?"

"Oh yes," said Jimmy. "Plenty of talk. Victor's scintillating conversation held the gathering enthralled."

Victor glanced at him quickly with a deprecating yet half-hopeful smile.

That was the best of anything to Jimmy, if he could get out of it a little fun, however exaggerated, in regard to Victor.

"You saw me talking to that supposed authority on early-printed books?" asked Victor. "Did you guess that I was telling him a few things he didn't know?"

He smiled proudly.

"The thought didn't leap to my mind," said Jimmy.

CHAPTER IV

i

ONE day when he came and sat with her Victor noticed how Imogen looked worn and petulant. She was hardly beautiful at this moment, looking a little spoilt with discontent, as if she were hankering indiscriminately for anything—for what rose naturally in her as a great human yearning could become a mere fretful impatience of each passing unsatisfied hour.

When he saw little fine lines under her eyes he thought for the first time of what her age must be—something between twenty-five and thirty. It pained him that she might be nearly thirty—because to love her so much now and yet that they should have been unaware of each other all those years could never seem to him anything but unnatural and painful.

Now he saw her looking plain, in spite of the perfect careful delicacy of her clothes—as if she had been quite defeated in her object of making herself beautiful. He felt weak with love, so that he hardly dared to touch her hand. But directly his arms were round her then for the first time she clung to him fast, her head drooping suddenly to him, so that he felt its soft warmth on his breast filling every desire he had ever had in life.

"I want love—I want to be loved," she moaned, beginning half-petulantly, but her tone becoming one of pure longing. And his answer so flowed from her appeal that it was as if she were still speaking, as if he spoke almost at the same time and with the same breath as hers, so perfectly did he create the spirit of

response as he said: "And so you shall—there, my love, you shall!" What each had said was the half of one whole. They felt the perfect whole, their hands clinging together; they were strong with peace.

In the way of companionship he knew her very well by now; time had made it possible for him to be with her and yet to think of other things; they had been together so much that he could be casual about the lesser minutes of their time in common—the minutes in between one thing and another, when he liked to get hold of the paper and read it while she told Edie where they had been, or went in and out of the room, as people go in and out when they are at home; and as he read he felt her presence, felt the security of her going out just for a minute, to come back again. And he had to be a little watchful, so his heart could never entirely relax from her. Once when he was alone with her, Edie being out, she left the room and went half way upstairs and came back again.

"It's dark," she said.

Without a word he fetched a lamp, took it up to her room and returned. So she went and glanced up the stairs—they were still dark, but from the open door of her room at the top the light fell down the banisters, and she went up. Now that he knew she was afraid he could never forget to be watchful after dark, and he carried a light before her when she was going upstairs.

She was very passive and silent. What she said was significant to him not with any clever quality, but simply with rarity; and her silence also tended to make the most ordinary things she did a little mysterious. This was specially noticeable in contrast to Edie; there was no mystery about Edie, she as it were announced herself at every stage. But with Imogen the most trivial things were rarefied with

uncertainty. Why has she gone upstairs? Will she be long? While Victor does not stop reading he can wonder suddenly what she is doing, and it thrills him to think that in her dark innocent mind is a purpose as she goes silently. He never needed that there should be any profound wisdom in her silence or in her little acts that carried her to and fro: there was perfect magic in those things in themselves. He never thought her clever or wanted to think so. He looked up at her as she came into the room. Without having meant to ask he said:

"What did you go up again for?"

"I forgot my ring," she replied, not troubling to look at him, and he felt sharp with knowledge, as if it were a secret, and went on reading.

But sometimes he discovered that in her silence she had been alert and watchful, perfectly apprehending. He took her to the New English Art Club and she said nothing while he talked to her in front of the picture that he admired so much that he could hardly leave it. But a few days later he saw a change in her, and realized that in her clothes she had reproduced the spirit of the woman in the painting. It was very easy to her, she loved to experiment with clothes. She was always so curious to see how she would look in different things. Oh the pride he felt in her because she had noticed and reproduced!

Over the ordering of her time he had complete mastery, and she fitted into everything with a mixture of docility and eagerness.

Then suddenly she could banish all his security and terrify him. He would suddenly see her ashamed and reluctant when he kissed her. Once she cried quietly. He had held her in his arms and then felt some unusual movement in her. He stopped breathing so that he should feel exactly, attending in terror. Then he saw her tears.

"But—" he began, and grew pale and stammered.

" Don't do that ! " she said.

" Why ? "

" It isn't right. Oh I am unhappy ! "

" Not right ! " he said, abashed, before his anger had time to rise.

" When I feel I'm not good—it is terrible."

" Who says you're not good ? "

" Everyone knows it isn't right."

" Has some fool been talking to you ? "

" No one," she said. " It's what I know."

He felt the hopeless unsuitability of mere anger. It was bewilderment and pain that he felt. Kissing her was to him the perfection of life. He tried to see it in any other light—and that was like changing his very being. He came to the conclusion that he had been too passionate a lover. How gentle he would be now !

Then, without acknowledging it to himself, he knew that she still did not love him, and that was the reason of her shame. He would not admit it to himself because he could not bear it, but sometimes he was bitterly angry in the misery of self-deception.

" I hate prudery," he said violently to her. " Why can't you love freely and naturally ? "

She was silent and helpless—but what a terrible power that weakness and helplessness had if without a movement or a word it could yet make it impossible for him to put his head against hers even in the mere *sadness* of love, not in its happiness ! It was as if bars were between them. He let his anger carry him on, so as to avoid what was far worse.

" I can't bear false shame, I wish you would try to understand ! " he said angrily another time. " There's nothing fine about it ; it makes me sick. For goodness' sake don't be like all the people who spend their lives covering up everything natural. Because *I* want something else in a woman, I tell you. Damn hypocrisy. No woman will ever satisfy me who is

like that. I want a fine free brave woman. . . ." He talked to her bitterly, describing the woman he wanted —and looked at her sitting there downcast, the woman he wanted exactly, exactly as she was.

Sometimes he was very violent with her because he had been violent all his life.

Then by degrees it was clear that false shame had nothing to do with her, and she did not love him yet. She told him plainly. He spent whole nights walking about the streets, always coming back to her dark window, imploring her in his heart to spare him from this death. In the daytime he kept away from her, for he felt repulsed in every part of him. Then Imogen missed him terribly. The end of the winter was interminable and wet, and she stood at the window looking down at the street, and when after many days she saw him coming she reddened and met him shyly and glowing with renewed life.

He carried out his absences only by the full force of his violent will. Sometimes he lay for whole days in bed so as to be perfectly inactive, almost in a stupor. At other times he avoided his bed until the last pleasure-haunt was closed and the last pleasure-seeker had passed from the streets.

And Imogen and Edie felt their days very heavy. At this time there was often a scarcity of money between them, and they were sharp with each other over their economies, and were often dull in the cold and the rain. They both suffered under the long aimless days, Imogen pining, as evening came on, for the riches and glamour of Victor's love to which she was used, and Edie longing for everything to be perfect and bright for her. If she had ever had any jealous feeling against Victor she was now only angry with him for staying away.

Then he came, and suddenly the whole atmosphere of the room had changed. Imogen met him shyly, he hardly looked at her.

"Aren't you cold?" he asked, speaking to Edie.

In a few minutes he had made up the fire, and the room grew rich with flame. He put a chair near it, but never looked at Imogen or spoke to her. She went to the chair and crouched over the fire, her delicate hands held out so that the firelight showed through them, her beautiful body hanging gently forward. Some parcels Victor had brought he undid silently and set their contents on the table. He was stern in everything he did. Edie talked gaily.

Victor made the tea; he brought a cup to Imogen at the fire. She glanced up at him, humbly, warmly, but saw only his proud stern look, his eyes withheld. But his pride was too self-conscious, and she could not feel awe of him, but pitied him. She took her tea eagerly and glanced at the table which was loaded with things. He came again, bringing her favourite things to eat. But he gave them sternly, almost grudgingly. The weather was too bad to go out; he had brought illustrated papers and a new pack of cards—sometimes they played poker. To Imogen and Edie the little room once more seemed to have resources and interests: for days it had been an empty prison. They both were kindled with renewed pleasure, their eyes looked brightly and smiles came and went on their faces though they might try to subdue them. For Victor preserved a cold demeanour, as if it were only by some purely indifferent chance that he was here at all or had provided for them so exactly according to their taste. He did not look at Imogen as she pored over the magazines, but without seeming to notice her he said once: "Take care; you will burn your dress," coldly rebuking her. The rain was rattling against the windows, and a cold dreary wind wailed down the street. Inside, there seemed to be a little world of light and warmth and security that the inimical weather, so loud and very near, could yet not prevail against; there was the pleasure of the hot tea,

the knowledge that all the evening would be spent together instead of in dreariness, and Imogen's gentle palpitating warmth towards Victor;—conciliatory and shy, her presence shone subdued in the room.

They had a game, sitting close to the fire. Imogen and Victor played in silence; only Edie's exclamations rang out in her bright shrill voice:

"Mother! Help! I've got a hand like a foot. Come on, Victor, it's for you to commence. Poor Edie, she'll never win with a hand like this, she can see that; Edie wasn't born yesterday." So she went on with her soliloquy, never leaving anything unsaid.

Later Edie went to her room to wash her hair.

Victor immediately took up a paper. He had addressed his conversation exclusively to Edie; now he read with an appearance of fixed absorbed attention.

"Won't you come nearer to the fire than that?" asked Imogen.

"No thank you," he said quickly.

But with him pride could never be really effective; he somehow lacked the power to make it so: it was exaggerated, it was not subtle. In the long-past days in a quarrel at school it had been the same; then he used to say—his face white, his eyes gleaming in a fury of pride and hate—"You can't do that to a C-c-carmichael! No. The Carmichaels don't stand that kind of thing." To him it was so grand, so deadly and crushing; but after a moment of surprise there would come from the other boys a burst of laughter.

But now the fact that his pride was exaggerated and self-conscious and not effective only made Imogen more warm and urgent in her instinct of pity. As she turned the pages of the *Studio* her eyes were half-seeing all the distance of floor between herself and him, she was wondering how cold he was, longing to see him smile, longing to humble herself to bring that

about. She felt a little afraid of him now, with his persistence in his rigidity.

He was not surprised soon to hear her voice. It had always been a matter of happiness with him that she talked more to him than to others.

"How strange!" she exclaimed. "The pictures reproduced here from the International Exhibition are the ones you yourself chose out, the very ones you liked."

"Are they?"

"Yes," she said eagerly, in a sweet pure voice of flattery. "The very same! Come and look. They are exactly the ones you liked. Aren't you pleased? —it shows how well you knew. . . ."

He sat still.

"I'm not aware," he said, "that my judgment needs confirming by some damned art critic."

"No, no, of course not," she said, hardly knowing how she had done wrong.

"—Who probably is an idiot like the rest of them."

"No, I only thought it curious," she said nervously. "They have come out very well; won't you look?"

She held out the paper to him, and he got up at once, but unwillingly, and took it. She saw his hurt, miserable eyes glance over it.

"May I tear them out?" she asked. "I would like to keep them."

"I will get you proper photographs, of course, of any you want," he said coldly.

"No, that would be a trouble, you mustn't do that."

"*Trouble?*" He looked at her in a kind of wild hopelessness, and met her fervent pitying eyes. In a moment he had sunk down at her feet, his head on her knees, his arms about her.

"My darling, my darling, I can't bear it! It is such torture. Imogen, Imogen, I love you so! Oh my God, you don't understand."

She sat over him with a look of anguish on her face. Her slim, round figure sat erect but brooding; she

was composed and pitiful as if she had retired into herself to grieve. She looked down at him and saw tears in his eyes, his face was pale. She put her beautiful, ringed hands on his fine, soft hair, touching it half-curiously, his tears came again and he was ashamed but he could not move. He began to feel an ecstasy of peace; he had not slept for many nights. He felt all the peace the world has ever known after storm and battle centring in his soul, but he was infinitely sad as well. Her hand moved over his head up and down and he almost drowsed. As she sat over him her eyes looked oblivious with pity, like the eyes of sculpture.

They soon heard Edie's movements in the next room take on an imminent sound as if she would be coming back. Victor got up simply and quickly and took Imogen strongly in his arms, like a man who gets up straight from sleep to his task. He was simple and powerful with love, and he wooed her with an intent noble passion which in its greatest ecstasy did not seem to petition for himself, but only to praise and praise. He put back his head and looked at her with his blue, worshipping eyes, in which love brought together humour and sadness.

"You are so beautiful!" he exclaimed, seeing her with fervent joy.

"And you," she said quietly. Then she added: "and you are so good."

He looked rather whimsically troubled. He felt he must say something to her on that subject. He could not remember his sins; they had been so little to him that he literally could not remember them at this moment. But he *could* remember terrible ravaging remorse, and so he knew his sins had been bad.

"I have done wrong, Imogen, before I knew you."

She looked as if that might be, but it made no difference. She said again, marvelling at him, in her tender emotion: "Yes, perhaps; but you are so

good—better than anyone I have ever known. There is something I feel in you——"

ii

They could not be married because she did not love him yet. He knew she would love him some day, but there was the horrible, unnatural strain of waiting. Sometimes he was happy and calm, but generally his tranquillity was gone in impatience and longing. When he heard that Clifford's departure for Canada had been prevented almost at the last moment by his becoming engaged to Theo, and that Mr. Jenner, convinced of Clifford's worth after many long talks with him, had given him a post which would make their marriage possible, he felt intolerably pained to think that no such security as an engagement belonged to his relation with Imogen.

The act of waking in the morning always brought him a great impulse of hope. "She will love me to-day!" He had to say that, overjoyed, as he woke anew to the world. But the day brought her little nameless repulsions, and corresponding bad temper and irritation in him. Sometimes the more noble the ambition a man is defeated of, the more ignoble and petty will be his irritations—at least it was so with Victor. It would in any case have been impossible for him to love without occasional anger, but in his present state of strain his irritation came quickly and easily against her. It was very miserable for him because it was dishonest; it afforded an outlet for his feelings, but it was dishonest because his true instinct was entirely to praise her, not to find fault with her.

They were together a great deal, and he took her to many places. He had an original exploring taste, which had made him discover beauty and character in many stray regions, and he took her here and there, explaining in his positive way what was true and false

beauty. In talking to her he discovered all the knowledge and subtlety of his own mind, which seemed to be suddenly developed now, but it was a cold discovery until she loved him. And by degrees she as it were knew his idiom, knew what he would praise, so it was as if she had the same taste herself. He was very exacting about her taste, but this also was only an hypocrisy, because, in fact, he was often thrilled in his inmost being by some hesitancy or misunderstanding in her. He also pretended to himself to be ashamed of her silence before other people, or of her trivial remarks of curiosity, by which she might well be set down as stupid. He had that warfare going on in him of superficial intolerance against her for those things, while in his heart he was simply worshipping her for being as she was.

So he even watched for the excuse for irritation against her, because she would not let him simply and wholly love her. When she went wrong in her taste he was long and violent in rebuking her. Another thing that offended him was her consciousness of other people when they were in a public place. He would talk to her very eagerly in some gallery before a picture, holding her arm in a kind of loving confidence. He was very noticeable and utterly unconscious of how people looked at him long and curiously, even standing by to hear what he said. Many people thought he must be some famous artist himself from the confidence and authority with which he spoke, and the romantic interest of his appearance. Then, as he made his love conspicuous by the close hold of her arm and the eager fond way he looked at her as he talked, she became embarrassed and shocked and wanted to appear quite ordinary before other people. If she took her arm out of his for this reason he was violently angry and contemptuous.

After he had been angry with her something came over him to torture him, and when they got back to

the little sitting-room he looked at her in a passion of tenderness and shame. However readily and easily she forgave him, her forgiveness was not enough for him, and he continued to have to reckon with his own pain in secret, only his eyes showing it.

And yet whatever he suffered from, it could not last. He was made of love of life, and the beauty of the world had never seemed to him so full and desirable as now. Perhaps some little thing would touch his humour—that was generally how it was: he gave a little odd reluctant whimsical laugh—and that was the beginning of the end.

iii

Imogen also had unhappy times, in a less degree. She was trying to love him completely, she had strong reasons for doing so. She knew she wanted a man to love her and a home to live with him in. She wanted love so much that she felt a yearning asserting itself in her nature, a passion which only grew stronger with repression, thriving on nothingness and denial as other things thrive on food. She knew the danger of that passionate craving of which her nature was partly made; only lately it had almost got the better of that other part of her character, the simple longing for goodness. She was shocked profoundly at what she felt in herself. She tried to discipline herself, but the mere sight of good jewellery glowing in a shop-window on a winter evening was enough to rouse in her a kind of personal longing which was beyond what she could control. It was a permanent scruple with her that she loved her pearl necklace with passion, though it had been given to her by the man whom she did not love and had fled from. She thought she ought to hate it for its association with temptation, and was shocked at herself because she loved it so much. She knew her longings had gone a little wild and astray,

and she wanted all to be regulated in marriage with Victor. Then also she could not bear Victor's pain. And at certain moments, when he had a kind of gay irresponsible tenderness with her, she almost loved him, and felt it was not impossible to do so quite.

Often she was suffering under the strain of *trying* to love. Imogen was made to be very happy: she had a genius for enjoyment and gratitude; so that it was often pathetic and strange that she should be so grateful, like one who had nothing of her own, and the most ordinary plan or excursion could fill her with pleasure when it was proposed. But sometimes when she was with Victor she was rebelling inwardly at what now seemed like the inevitable necessity of loving him, and she was petulant and heavy even when he had some carefully planned pleasure for her; the most feeling she would then show was only to become a little sullen and cold with disappointment if anything postponed the pleasure.

It was too painful always to be showing him that she simply and inexplicably did not love him. So she too found fault with what did not really offend her in him, carping with him in sententious criticism rather than say that plain deadly thing: "I don't love you."

"You shouldn't say those words," she said when he swore.

"Imogen, my darling!" he protested, and could not help giving a little involuntary laugh of amused shame. He was amused because of his luck in having used comparatively mild words.

"You shouldn't say those things," she repeated with increasing feeling, and it was a relief to her poor struggling heart to have some pretext for rebuking him.

But it was a pretence, for whatever he did she could never doubt his goodness. She might seem to be shocked at his passion, but that again was a pretence,

because she knew that in his very passion he would be capable of the supremest heights of sacrifice for her sake. Though once his kisses had been a temptation which she felt she must deny herself because she did not truly love him, now in her effort to love him she let him kiss her, and tried sadly to think that his kisses could still, as it were, contain the matter of temptation. For as temptation they had been alluring and now as a duty and effort they were only sad.

And yet suddenly they could be gay and shy together. Victor took a studio in Chelsea, where he meant to carry out new plans he had for work. Generally he took Imogen with him, but one day she was to find her way by herself and meet him there. As he went up the long stone staircase to his light airy studio at the top, he felt each stair was pregnant with Imogen, her feet would so soon be upon them. He was more Imogen than himself, as he went up, so keenly was he imagining her as she would soon be, taking these very steps. The staircase was uncared-for, no one's responsibility; the shabby look of the doors that gave on to it suggested that none of the tenants would be likely to do more than meet their own strict liabilities in the matter of cleanliness. A hard mat had been taken up off the stone landing and laid on the window-sill, where it stuck stiffly out into the rain—someone's hopeful notion of dealing with its dust. Victor picked up a piece of paper off the stairs. When he reached the studio he threw up the windows to let in air and lit the stove; he had intended to occupy himself until she was due, but he could do nothing. He felt half terror, half joy: all the months of knowing her had only increased the wild emotions she could produce in him.

She came rather timidly this first time, afraid of not finding him. Even after she had safely arrived and the door was closed behind her, she continued to appear a little startled and shy. He looked at her

fondly, he could hardly believe in her beauty. They could neither of them say much, but they were both glad.

"You came all right by bus?" he asked. "Yes, your ticket is still in your hand. Did you think it would take you back, my little treasure? . . . Oh Imogen, as you stand there—you bring me such joy! Come near the stove. Supposing you caught cold here. *There's* a thought!" he said, imitating Edie.

There was a great noise outside. She was smiling faintly, she hardly heard what he said, but did not make any effort to do so.

"Dearest, come to the stove," he said. "Damn that steam-roller. Do you think if we gave it sixpence it would go and roll in the next street? Come along, Imogen, and get warm."

iv

Victor's whole life expanded. He now had great ambitions in regard to work: the books in the library opened out a whole world of possibility, in which he was going to do great things.

It was curious to touch the books now in the new light of knowledge and plans in regard to them—for each book had an association with the past and with ignorance. Each book was two books—one that he remembered distinctly seeing and touching in ignorance as a child, another that which he now held in his mature hand. Each book was one thing as a memory and another thing as a new mine of interest.

It was a marvellous collection of books, and it afforded scope for work of a romantic and absorbing nature. In certain notable branches it was so nearly complete that any one owning it and loving it and discovering some deficiency could not help feeling he had an urgent mission to supply it: there were a few

rare books that Victor was determined to secure somehow or other. To help to accomplish this he could sell books that were less rare, or less in the province of this particular library. He made a list of a few hundred miscellaneous books which he considered he could dispose of for a good price, and he keenly watched the dealers' catalogues for the chance of obtaining certain others. In any important thing he did he consulted Jimmy, whose shrewd knowledge surprised him. But though Jimmy advised him he was indifferent to the improvement that Victor was making in their library. What the library had been to Jimmy all his life it would be to him for ever; he did not want a new emotion in regard to it. He could not change his habit of satisfaction with it into an effort to improve and complete it. Even though it was now actually his trade to deal with rare books he never wanted to change his own library: he was indolently fixed in his attitude of mind towards it, the attitude of mind that had grown up with him. His book-buying energies he never used on his own behalf, all his cupidity was devoted to Mr. Jenner's library. It happened once or twice that Victor and Jimmy bade against each other at a sale. Victor did not bid well; he either was not quick enough to make up his mind, and so missed a treasure, or else he was carried away by a mere furious spirit of competition over some book that he only half wanted—when, his mind having flared with excitement and fury and triumph, he would suddenly realize with a dull, almost sickening feeling that he had just become the possessor of a book that he hardly wanted for a price that was in advance of its value to him. On both the occasions when he and Jimmy found themselves bidding for the same book it was Jimmy who secured it. At home in the evening they both laughed over the little adventure, Jimmy kept recurring to it with his quiet, amused laugh, the book lying on the table before him to go

to Mr. Jenner to-morrow, his amused eyes dwelling speculatively on Victor.

"It's really a great pity the auctioneer didn't understand you," he said teasingly, "because I've got the book absurdly cheap."

"Yes, and I made a sign distinctly," said Victor, aggrieved.

"I think he must have thought you'd got something in your eye—or something like that," suggested Jimmy. He continued to speculate about it while Victor sat by curiously happy to be made fun of by Jimmy.

And beyond the buying and selling of books there was a wide field of industry opening out to Victor in regard to the library. He was going to make an annotated catalogue on a careful system, in fact he was more or less imitating Jimmy's procedure with Mr. Jenner's library—he generally ended by imitating Jimmy after first slightly scorning his plan. His enthusiasm in regard to the notes he was going to write grew by leaps and bounds until he determined at last that on one little department alone of the collection an important book could be written to unfold an unsuspected literary fact. Jimmy and he had grown up in the knowledge of this fact, afforded by the evidence of a little group of the rarest books in the library, but to the world it was unknown.

In handling the books all his life Victor had acquired a large amount of out-of-the-way knowledge; he now made that knowledge more special and complete; often when he left Imogen he hurried to the British Museum. But she was in the habit of sending him errands, she depended on him to do everything for her; and sometimes when he had planned to be at the Museum he was fetching something for her instead, or meeting her and Edie after they had been shopping in Regent Street to give them tea.

Imogen had even in her occasional fault-finding with him remarked in her soft rebuking manner on

the necessity for industry in a man. She argued that if Clifford had worked he would not have brought calamity down on them; and this idea of work had, as it were, become a convenient moral with her, which she used against Victor when her own inner unhappiness demanded that she should express some grievance against him. Having uttered it, it was so unreal that she immediately forgot it, and would tell him the next minute to meet her in Regent Street instead of going to the Museum, and take him with her from shop to shop. He often had an enthusiastic plan of work to postpone on this account, but never once—even when they were strained and unhappy together—did he show her anything but joy in doing the commonest behest for her. His love went deep into his soul, and, as great love does, it discovered his very finest qualities. He did not love for nothing, merely for his own advantage: he had a perfect delicacy of unselfishness, and he had that extra refinement of manner which made him not only conceal that occasionally he had to forsake plans and appointments of his own, but conceal it with such perfect art that all she felt in him was his joy in serving her. In that way he was a very lavish lover, lavish with the service of love. One afternoon he was going to attend a sale of special interest, to which every dealer had been looking forward for many weeks. He saw Imogen in the morning, and she asked him half petulantly to go out with her and Edie in the afternoon. He knew they would not be happy, for Imogen was just now strained with effort and dissatisfaction; he would not even be alone with her, but would merely wander round with her in her heavy irritability. As he agreed at once to come, without mentioning the sale, she saw in him only that little kind of lift of joy with which he never failed to respond to her. She could not make a suggestion for them to be together, in whatever circumstances, without his lighting up in a quick, deep

tenderness of response. In that way there can never have been a more rich lover than Victor.

He took the studio in Chelsea and carried some of his books there; it stimulated him to go out to his work rather than sit down to it at home. And it was such a wonderful, always new, joy to see the hands of the clock work round to a certain time, to go on writing but with a pause for listening between each word, to hear after some time a step on the stairs which made him motionless as if with panic until he got up and opened the door and saw Imogen, saw the perfect radiant vision that she was to him, coming to the top of the dusty stairs.

She was always late; also she was slightly on her dignity, as if half-rebuking him because she was there alone with him in his room. He adored that mixture in her, when she had her little air of being exceedingly particular and scrupulous, treating him with formality, and yet her rich clamorous beauty with its perpetual luxuriant appeal mitigating her firm attitude even as she adopted it.

And in every way Victor was widened and developed; a broader humanity showed in his face. He seemed now to know what all pain and all joy were—so that people felt it in him, and he was of more account than when he had seemed impotently without mastery of himself or of anything. Loving had released him from his unwilling, unhappy egotism.

CHAPTER V

i

ONE day Victor was at the Jenners' house, which was frequently a meeting-place for himself and Imogen and Clifford. He was on very friendly, easy terms with Christie, and he came and went often, knowing she was glad when he came. With Mr. Jenner he talked about books, or showed his well-informed interest in the various collections—of mezzotints and china and other things—that Mr. Jenner loved to show. But one day he happened to have been left to himself and he strolled about a large drawing-room waiting for the time when Christie should have disposed of a succession of business-visitors, and Imogen should arrive to tea. There were plenty of things to examine in the vast, majestic-looking room; it was so large that a figure at the other side of it would look small and distant, and a voice speaking low would be lost in space.

He was far from the door and saw someone come in. He could not have told how it was that he got the impression of something ghastly and horrible. For it was only Theo who came in, paused, was going out again, but turned and came towards him. But he did get that impression, and when he saw her coming with a strange, weak, blind walk over the vast space of floor he went to meet her and felt the horror growing in him.

He knew what suffering was; he could meet people in pain and be inside their pain with them. As he went to meet her he thought he had never been in

the presence of grief like this: to see her little slight figure carrying it, and her little thoughtless face having to express far more than it was made to hold, called up a depth of sadness into his own face; his eyes looked noble and deeply knowing with suffering as he watched her.

He took her hands and held them with a kind of passion; he forgot Imogen, he was Theo's absolutely—as almost everyone can once or twice in a lifetime in an abandonment of pity belong utterly away from the one he truly loves.

"Something terrible has happened to me," she said.

"I know."

"Shall I ever be able—?" she stopped, in utter grief.

"To bear it?" He tried to consider, while his pity yearned over her passionately. "It depends what it is. Yes, most things—yes, Theo, you will be able to bear it."

She looked at him, wondering, incredulous, the iron spell of despair broken for one minute even by the mere fact that she had to listen. She might not believe him, but she had at least to open her mind to hear and take it in. It was at any rate something someone was saying.

She went away, out of a side door, but not knowing where to go. She could not stay still, but went on that terrible, homeless wandering of a person in pain. Clifford had told her something out of his past, and though she had left him some hours ago with loathing and scorn, it was a kind of horror against herself that she now felt. "What am *I*? Why doesn't he laugh at me for never having suspected? I am only someone who never thought that such a thing was possible. Why doesn't he laugh at me!" she thought madly. She felt she had been something fine when she was happy, but now was to be despised by every living

creature, as if her suffering were an unspeakable shame which degraded her far beyond the man who caused it. He still remained in a world of light and people—one of many, if only evildoers like himself; it was *she* that was the outcast, absolutely alone and branded.

She saw Clifford at the end of the passage come back to her. His face was white and painful.

"You can't leave me for that," he said as she came near.

"If I could only tell you—" she began passionately.

"Theo, you can't leave me," he said, white and dogged.

"If I could tell you how I hate you!" she said. "If only I could somehow make you know what it is I feel——"

"Yes," he said with his strong doggedness, "but you can't leave me."

"No, I can't," she said, looking at him coldly. Her voice was only a tragic whisper.

"You will still marry me?"

"Only if it can be at once," she said.

"Yes, it shall be."

"Absolutely at once—or else I can't live," she said hardly, looking at him with her hatred of the evil sharpening her eyes. He gave her hand a hard, quick pressure from which she recoiled and was gone. Not even to dare to comfort her was a final agony of retribution to him, never to be forgotten or surpassed.

ii

From various mentions which had been made of Norton Abbey it was clear that Mr. Jenner had a very fine country house, and as soon as Theo's wedding, which took place in June, was over, and Christie began to take brief journeys to the country to prepare the house for her father and their friends, the Carmichaels found themselves engaged to spend some weeks of

the coming summer in the Wold with Christie. She wanted to take her father away early this year because he was in need of a rest. She became more than ever occupied with the countless arrangements she had to make for all the people who depended on her. When Victor went to see her by appointment at twelve o'clock one morning he felt a whimsical remembrance of the dentist, for on the stairs as he was shown to her sitting-room he passed Christie's preceding visitor passing out, and he was vaguely conscious of patient figures downstairs waiting to succeed him. And also Christie greeted him with that visible recalling of the circumstances of his visit which occurs when the dentist shows a flattering remembrance of the patient's peculiar difficulties.

Christie had a way of exacting willing service from other people, and whatever she might have asked of him Victor would have done loyally in his friendship for her. He had several times worked for her when she needed a man. Now when he was shown in she turned to him with her young, collected look, at the same time putting aside the papers connected with the affairs of her last visitor. "Don't suppose that I don't remember that you were coming or exactly why I sent for you," her bright glance seemed to assure him; "I remember perfectly."

"Won't you go down to the country for me for a few days?" she began by asking him.

"Yes, of course I will, Christie," he said quickly. For that negative form in which she was apt to put a question always made one feel as if one had already been guilty of refusing her something, and eager to reassure her.

"I will explain," she said in her cool way. "I went round to see Imogen this morning early, to put a plan before her. You know it is very lovely to have Imogen as one of the family." She always spoke of her with a little deepening of her consciousness, as if

some glamour from Imogen fell upon her. "I asked her what she was going to do for the summer; she said she was anxious not to leave Edie yet."

"Edie's not particularly fit just now," Victor explained.

"I know. Well, they have agreed both to go to the Quell cottage—that is, two miles from us at Norton. Father bought the cottage last year because of a perfect early Norman window at one side. Victor, it is the ideal place for them," she said, her eyes shining with her simple benign look that made her almost beautiful. "But so much must be done before they go; won't you help? I can't go there at once myself. I might send servants but it would not be the same. Will you go for a few days and superintend all that must be done?"

He looked at her fondly, but immediately became hardly aware of her in the happy vision that filled his mind. For some time they continued to talk together, making arrangements, and all the time he had to suppress his happy thoughts of Imogen, to postpone them. But he knew she would love him in the summer in the country.

He was to have gone in a week's time. But he was delayed. When he got home that night his mother's manner was hard to him, and he was puzzled until he discovered that she was ill. Immediately, he not only endured her little sharp sayings but almost wanted her to hurt him, so keen were his pity and love. He looked after her tenderly, and when Jimmy came home she was on the sofa, shaded from the light, a shawl spread lightly over her, from which her immobile head emerged, her profile lifted sharply in the air as she lay on her back.

"Have you got a headache?" asked Jimmy uneasily after a moment's pause.

A wave of shamed embarrassment came over her as she felt his uneasiness.

"It's nothing, dear," she said.

For a week she grew steadily worse and the doctor was called. He could not help her, and she was tortured with pain. Every evening when Jimmy came home he entered the room with the same painfully-roused unwilling look of sensitiveness. Each evening he said difficultly after a pause: "Have you still got your headache?" He kept it down to a headache, never using a stronger word; all through her bad illness he tried to spare himself the realization of it, speaking of it with difficulty and belittling it to spare himself what was cruel to him. He wanted to go away, to be unaware of it.

All the week Victor was constantly with her, leaving her only to see Imogen. One night he stayed only half an hour with Imogen and hurried home again. He went straight to his mother's bedroom to see her settled in for the night. As he opened the door his heart stood still. She had got out of bed and was standing in terror in the middle of the room, in a crisis upon which her very life seemed to hang. Victor felt as if this was the dreadful thing he had been waiting all his life for, knowing it lurked in the world. Every intangible fear he had ever had, every nameless horror in childhood, were justified now.

"What is it, my darling!" he said. He led her back to bed, where she lay quiet and exhausted; he rang the bell and sent for the doctor, and bent over her again his pale frightened face, saying fond words that his voice yearned over. "You are better now," he said as if he were praising her. "And you want Jimmy," he went on, seeing her eyes pass him over, dissatisfied. "Well, my darling, I will go and fetch him now." But she gave a deep sigh, that died so faintly on the air that it seemed to hold time in suspense, and Victor remained still, half-lying on the bed, pressing her hand. The short night was only a few hours

long, it had not the length that they in their stillness had.

When Jimmy came to her the next day to say good-bye all signs of the spasm had passed. For some time he had been contemplating an expedition to the book-shops of some provincial towns, and now he could not resist the temptation to carry out the plan at once. All these days the puzzled, dissatisfied, unwilling look had never left his face, and according to his habit of escape he was sure to go.

"Good-bye," he said. "Mind you are better by to-morrow." He always put her recovery at to-morrow. She watched him moving about her room—as people spend a little time in a sick-room not quite liking to go. He had on a new suit of a rather bright blue colour, he had grown more handsome with the passing years; the very white collar of his soft shirt suited his fine tolerant face; he had beautiful hands, strong and square but fine-looking; and his look of mixed fineness and strength made it difficult to know which it was one loved him for. His mother's eyes dwelt on him, fascinated by every detail of all his personal things.

"Good-bye," he said again from the door, "you must be quite well by to-morrow."

She recovered quickly. In a few days' time Jimmy returned and Victor left for Norton.

iii

Between him and the little grey town the road ran flat through the marsh-land, and Victor went to and fro fetching things from the town; he went in the early evenings when, after being alone all day, he always began at a certain time to think of the town. The hedgeless road went flat through the water-meadows, and in the two miles there were three gates going across the road, which the straying cattle sometimes

stood by, looking over, or rubbed their heads against, leaving strands of strong, reddish hair in the splitting of the wood. Each of these long wooden gates had its own distinct manner of opening and shutting; Victor let the gates swing and walked on, and each gate made a different sound behind him. One shut sharply at once on a single click; another swung itself slowly backwards and forwards, rocking itself shut, the click it gave each time it passed its latch gradually coming quicker and quicker; the last, after he had flung it wide open, took an incredibly long time to travel slowly shut. Often when he had taken many steps forward on his road, listening unconsciously for its sound, he would think it must indeed this time have swung too wide and was fixed there; but just as he turned round to look, its slow almost imperceptible movement would just be carrying the latch loosely home, with its faint clank of wood.

He loitered in the steep, grey town, passing in and out of the shops, drinking at the inns, and walked home after dark on the flat road between the brooks. The town-lights became a little narrow group behind him, sometimes a distant voice called somewhere in the town, and he wondered why, or a dog barked far away, and again in his dark solitude he wondered why it could be.

In the mornings he was up early, he had so much to do. Christie had intended only that he should direct the work, but he did it himself. He dug in the garden. The earth yielded reluctantly, only inch by inch. Sometimes he dug as he used to play hockey—angrily, with venom. He stuck his spade ringing into the earth, and his strength was like anger, interchangeable. His spade striking down would come on a stone, and the dull aching thud of invincible resistance went painfully up his arm. He cut the weeds and overgrown grass in the paddock. The sickle swung to and fro with his arm; in his inexperience he had to use

it with all his strength or else it merely stroked the thin, weedy grass flat. To cut the grass through, his most central energy was involved; he worked up and down in long lines, stooping low in the sun. His face was wet, the veins of his right arm stood out large, he kept glancing ahead to where he wished he had already reached. He worked on and on until it was as if he were in another world. Mere fatigue he had long left behind, cruel fatigue had been a very early stage of his progress; he worked on in deep happiness. The sun burned him through. One day the heat was so great that when the sun passed behind a slow, thunderous cloud, he said: "Thank God!" as if the importance to him were of life and death. A few heavy drops fell in large, separate spots of rain on his shirt, it seemed an alleviation beyond anything he could have imagined. In a minute the sun scorched him again as he worked on.

All the time he knew there was a treasure waiting for him when he could take time from his work. He hardly thought of it now, so portentously engrossed was he. He still exaggerated the importance of everything he did. But he knew that in the town and in the villages there was something waiting for him, like a prize. He saw a monolith in an old barn that he passed, or by the roadside a tap in a niche of perfect Gothic stone-work; in the town a stray stone doorway leading only to a yard when it might have led to a cathedral. His passion for architecture stirred in him the beginnings of great joy. And it no longer troubled him how to connect himself with this beauty that was in store for him; since he loved Imogen he did not ache to connect himself, but he felt that everything was part of him.

Every day he laboured hard getting it ready. A woman was working indoors and looked after him, but his solitude was long and contented. One evening he stood at the window looking out; the field was

gold under the moon, only the river was white with the streaky mist that rose narrowly out of it. He stood so long, thinking only of outside, that suddenly the darkness in the room behind him, as it were, caught his eye at the side with surprise. He turned round to see that the room had grown quite dark. He thought how Imogen would have been terrified to have found herself thus caught in the dark. He turned again to the window and leant out.

" Oh, my little timid bird," he thought, " my whole heart goes out to you to-night."

The serene moon shone mildly in the vast, milky plain overhead ; he gazed into that still sea of light, and there seemed no reason why he should move.

CHAPTER VI

i

IMOGEN could be quite strict with Edie; in fact for the whole world she had a strict, rigid formula of goodness which made her sometimes a little cold with righteousness.

One day she came home unexpectedly early. Edie was still out, but in a few minutes Imogen heard the front door open with a key downstairs and the sound of talking on the doorstep. Edie, finding herself alone for the day, had been out with Vi Porter, whom she very rarely saw nowadays. Even now she would not ask Vi in, but evidently she had enjoyed her expedition. Imogen heard the sound of their voices and laughter coming up. They must have been taken out by some man.

"He's very much struck on you," said Vi.

"Oh, very attentive—compliments are cheap," agreed Edie mockingly.

They both laughed as they talked of him. Soon their voices changed to the tone of people saying things just before they part; their voices became louder and quicker, showing they had already begun to separate. "So long, Ede!" Imogen heard; "let's see you again this side of kingdom come." "Perhaps," replied Edie lightly. "Be good."

She came upstairs and was startled to find Imogen. She looked at her shyly, ashamed, and Imogen wore a look of anxious, unhappy reproach.

"Edie, you won't ever put yourself in the way of temptation, will you?" she said with a beautiful

earnestness. Edie blushed. Had Victor been there, he would inwardly have laughed, as Imogen could make him laugh deep in himself in his love. That strict, sententious look on her face always stirred him to a kind of mirthful tenderness of worship ; it was such a beautiful little anomaly on her eager, hungry face.

During this June Imogen spent a great deal of time with Christian Jenner, going about with her to parties. A little glamour of romance had come into Christie's life, so that her face changed and shone when she even spoke of Imogen. Christie took her to parties, but her eagerness was always followed quickly by dissatisfaction ; she was sometimes petulant, and after starting out for a place radiant with expectation, would even become weary and dissatisfied before she reached it. She suffered from a passionate discontent : she tried not to allow it in herself, but to others her beauty was strangely stirring with it. To many people who met her it brought a keen apprehension of romance only to look at her. But always she continued to abide by a formula of goodness which would hardly allow her even to inquire into her own state. When Christie once said to her : " I want you to be fully happy, I long for you to have the best of everything," Imogen replied, hesitating : " We should try to be satisfied with what is given to us,"—but the red mouth seemed to say something different from the words it spoke, and her eyes answered Christie with a quick, eager look, as if Christie had promised her something.

She was naturally luxurious, and the elaborate state which was kept in Christie's house suited her perfectly. One night when there was a late party there she stayed to sleep. As she leisurely and luxuriously undressed in the large room, lit at various points by a rosy light, and sat for a long time while the maid dragged the brush softly through her hair, and lay at last in the luxurious bed, with a soft-shaded light at

her side, and the latest novels to choose from, and Christie creeping in at two o'clock, very fond, to say good night, Imogen's content was very sweet. She said her prayers as soon as she turned out the light, and felt no fear of the dark, saying her prayers with careful recollection. She then lay rocked to sleep by coming and going visions of the evening that had passed.

All the evening Jimmy's composure had been just slightly interfered with by his consciousness of the necessity to avoid her. Otherwise he had been perfectly contented, for he had now got the habit of enjoying that a day's work should end in this way. He liked dressing at leisure and sitting with his mother in the early part of the evening. It pleased him that later when he went out she should go to bed; he liked to feel she was going to bed, he liked all the placid, orderly, habitual things that people did, he liked her to go at the same time every night. The summer was very hot in London, and he sauntered through the streets and arrived late at the Jenners. There he stood about with that air of fashion and ease that made him not merely fit the occasion, but even add to it a kind of special, indolent grace; he stood dark-eyed in doorways, tolerant and amused. Above any other man he could, as it were, stroll through the occasion, taking it with a genuine lightness that so many other people could only assume. There was more than one girl whom he had by now met so often, that he had reached with her a fairly advanced stage of acquaintanceship, he would know whether to expect her on a given occasion or not, and would inevitably find himself beside her in the course of the evening, talking with that amount of familiarity of which it was he who set the pitch, and he who preserved it incredibly unchanging. But first with him before these others was Christie herself; they did not fail to come together frequently in the course of an

evening, and never parted without knowing they would soon find themselves together again. But with Imogen it was different. If he saw her in one room he instinctively chose to go to another; he did not think about her; he saw round a corner a gold dress, a face lifted up in conversation, the eyes too interested, the sweet mouth parted a little with expectation, and he turned away. Ever since he first saw her that had been his instinct, but it was only on the night of this party that he had been conscious of an actual impelling need to be where he could not see her—a need more violent than anything he wanted to feel, spoiling his ease. So that even when he had obeyed the instinct and left her, he was still disturbed by what he had felt.

A few days later the Jenners gave their last party before they retired to the country. It was in the garden on the last day of June, and Christie was tirelessly receiving guests. It had not been certain that Jimmy could come; when their eyes met her face was lighted up for a moment with a special look of welcome, one of those looks that gave an illusion of beauty in her.

Jimmy wandered about, but not with the perfect ease that he used to have. As on the evening a little while ago, he felt a need driving him. He never examined his feelings, he only did not want to feel. Here and there he stopped to speak to someone and moved on again. All the time something urgent was growing in him; he felt such an impulse, without knowing what for, that he was utterly strange to himself. That afternoon something unusual was in him, something that he did not order or control. He tried to make his feelings ordinary by putting them into ordinary words. He remembered how the other evening he had seen Imogen in one room and had turned with a quick feeling of escape into another. "There must be something in Imogen that I dislike," he thought, puzzled. He had a kind of natural

courtesy which made him ashamed of thinking this. "It is quite unaccountable," he thought, as if to defend her.

But his feelings did not seem to respond to his own description of them; he had none of that satisfaction and abatement which the mere accurate description of one's feelings generally brings. Whenever he was stopped he soon passed on again; he was carried out of himself in an urgent restlessness. He thought he was escaping from seeing Imogen. He passed through the part of the garden where the people stood in close crowded groups, and went down to where they were only scattered in side-paths beneath the trees. Here he came face to face with Imogen. "There she is!" he thought. In that moment he knew he had been looking for her. "Ah, there she is," he thought again, and there was nothing else to think because that expressed the whole object and end of the force that had been driving him.

She was sitting with a man, on her face the dull look which could so quickly alternate with her eager look. She was pale with the heat. Jimmy passed, gazing at her, still thinking: "There she is!" as if that was the end of thought. Her eyes met his, and until he passed they looked at each other.

ii

Victor returned to fetch Imogen and Edie, for he could not imagine their getting off successfully without him. When he found her in the little narrow hot street, and remembered what was waiting for her in the Wold, he could hardly bear to delay even a day before taking Imogen, and she also was longing to go. To all of them the little street became suddenly impossible with its glaring, dusty sunshine and the incredibly anomalous look which both its houses and its population took on in fine weather.

"There was a row farther down the street this morning," said Edie as they packed; "in fact there's still some happy times going on down there now. If anyone was to have told me that Imogen would live here for nearly a year I should have turned round and contradicted them. In a place like this!" she said, looking at Imogen with shining tender eyes. She was very glad that a change was coming for Imogen's sake; for her own part there were certain things in the world that she secretly distrusted because they were so strange to her habit of life. She had a natural fear of servants; and of carefully-spoken elderly gentlemen like Mr. Jenner, whom she had met once; and she did not see how the country was going to provide the only kind of good time that she understood anything about. And yet the thought of being parted from Imogen brought her the one true notion of sadness that she had ever had in her life and no other consideration had any importance beside that.

Imogen could hardly wait; she kept asking Victor about the place she was going to, and he always had a little hesitating leap of the heart before he answered, to make his answers the utmost that she could hope of them. She quickly grew tired of packing, and with the degree of intimacy which they had now reached together she let him help her even in this, though not without hurting him a little with her manner, because she could never give him anything without wanting to take away something else. She could not have managed without him; he carried things about for her. She was annoyed that he came into her room where she and Edie were working together among her things, and when he saw her rebuking look he was immediately passionately angry with her and went downstairs. They were both not perfectly direct in their emotions because of the strain there was in their relations. Soon they had to call him up again to help, which he began to do sullenly, and then

became deeply absorbed. And so when the last day and the last hours had come she would have been helpless without him, and he was putting her things in her trunks, things that he loved to touch, but he dared not show his love because even while she called him and needed him she was half-rebuking him.

But the country turned out more successful for Edie than she herself had expected. She found herself more or less in seclusion with Imogen, two miles away from the Jenners at the Abbey. Within reason she enjoyed those things in Nature which Victor and Imogen talked about—the cuckoo early and late; behind the cottage the water-meadows, yellow with buttercups, divided by the low grey walls, dipping up and down with the uneven ground; the little wild river running through its flowered banks. She had such good food to eat that she felt herself growing well and strong, and as Victor came daily from the Abbey with some plan for them, she was not bored. She felt a kind of fond indulgence both for Victor and Imogen when their zeal had them up early and late intent on all the things they wanted to be doing, swimming in the morning, rowing far down the river, walking to distant villages, or speeding away on their bicycles in the cool evening—Victor, with his passionate care of Imogen, guarding against the fatigue which she herself never foresaw. Edie generally would not do these things, she was very lazy; she would lie in the garden for hours, her bright, pretty figure stretched in a long chair while she read fitfully and luxuriated in her own idleness. When Victor sometimes tried to stir her she resisted him mockingly, but she looked with fondness at his keen face indignantly persuading her. He wanted her to enjoy herself in the fullest way.

"Come along, Edie," he said one day, "you must come to the forest where Imogen and I were yesterday."

"Must I? Who told you?"

"Come along now."

"How do you suppose I shall get there?" she asked.

"I imagined you'd walk with us, of course."

"Poor thing," she said, "he's gone a bit off in his imagination."

While she was willing to admire things in reason she knew where to draw the line; she knew where the others went a little mad in a way that she loved indulgently in them, but would not emulate. One day they were persuading her to get up the next morning for the dawn. It was a plan for all of them to meet from both houses and see the sun rise over the plain of meadows that lay underneath the wold. It was Victor's arrangement and he was rounding them all up with his serious enthusiasm. When he talked to Edie about it, Christian and Jimmy were present, having walked over with him from the Abbey, and Edie, on her good behaviour, dealt with the suggestion tactfully. She excused herself in short little sentences, pausing between each while she sometimes hummed a few notes of a tune. She was arranging some flowers and held her head on one side as she looked at her handiwork.

"Get up and see the dawn?" she said. "What, me?

"I daresay it's very nice, that kind of thing.

"For those that like it, that is.

"Not for this child though.

"No," she went on, "Edie will be safe in bed.

"And asleep, which is more."

And so when the appointed time came Imogen got up and stole down the stairs alone, opened the door, stood appalled at the unfamiliar world, and passed out.

CHAPTER VII

i

AT the time when Jimmy came to the country he was troubled in his mind. There were certain occasions when a sharp uneasiness came to him. One night when they all rose from dinner at nine o'clock someone went to the window and remarked that it was still light. "Still light," he thought, pleased—and immediately a blank came upon his mind. "Still light, but *for what?*" something in him asked, and as he stood in the background he had a poignant, desolate sense as of opportunity but nothing to fill it with. He turned his eyes from the window where the pale, green light in the west seemed long with opportunity and full of unusual pain for him.

But the feeling returned at other times and more comprehensively. He began to think that his youth was passing. He was afraid he was perhaps getting old without noticing it. He saw he had forgotten ever to change his point of view from that of extreme youth; he had always felt that he was only on the threshold of living, and now when he was over thirty he realized that it was time to adjust that. That was how people did grow old—without noticing it, but it was happening all the same. He thought: "it is like that with everything—one goes on thinking of a thing as being new by habit, long after it is old. And people go on thinking themselves young by habit."

And then when he tried to resume perfect peace of mind by reassuring himself that he was still young and that there was no need to anticipate age, he was

still troubled. That was not enough. So he was brought to realize that youth was not really something in itself—it was an opportunity. This came to him one day with all the cogency with which a simple truth impresses itself at last on a mind which has evaded it. He was walking in the Abbey garden on a flagged path between low rows of espalier fruit-trees. The trees had been trained to careful symmetrical shapes, but the old supports had vanished, and the trees continued to stretch out their arms in formal shapes upon the air like a carved figure of Christ one might see broken off from the cross. Walking there with his unwilling troubled thoughts he knew that youth was an opportunity for love.

After being very occupied in town he had sudden leisure now in surroundings of undreamt-of beauty. When the Carmichaels first saw the Abbey and its garden they looked with a kind of new astonishment on the Jenners because they had not spoken more of this place. To have had such a possession and not to have insisted on its special beauties was a great refinement of ownership—and, indeed, the more he knew of Christie the more Jimmy felt how great a reserve fund she had in herself of things that she did not proclaim. With her he wandered in great contentment about the garden, where old yews were cut in shapes like chessmen and the flowers rose up until there was nothing between them and the blue distant hills. Or he lay on the grass in the sun beside his mother while she read aloud. But soon he would wander alone again through that garden, and all the time it was as if he were trying to shut his heart. Everything that he saw seemed not so much something in itself but keen with opportunity. He tried to think of a thing just in itself, something in this present moment—but instead he would always be seeing it fraught with possibility, what it might be if something were otherwise. He became sometimes worried almost

beyond endurance with the sense of missing things, of being, as it were, not eligible for them. Life seemed to be round the corner, in some other time or place, not just here. Then he had to tell himself forcibly: "This is life, this minute, this sensation. When I see something I like now, that is a fact complete in itself." And yet always in a different way from that would some new beauty come to his perceptions—it would always come quick and sharp with *possibility*.

He concluded that it was probably necessary for a man's happiness that he should marry, and though at first that seemed a change that he dreaded he soon grew accustomed to the idea and could tone it down to that low even level at which he liked all things to be. Marriage need not be such a tremendous emotion and adventure; there would be quietude in it, more quietude than he seemed able to depend on now, unmarried. Something had developed in him and brought this quick crisis. So he resolved on marriage, but as most men would count on its joys Jimmy counted on how little it could be, how small a change it need make.

He thought of Christie with great satisfaction; with all these thoughts she seemed to fit in. As he accustomed himself to the idea of marriage the next stage was to accustom himself to the idea that Christie would be his wife, and this he began to do.

There came a morning when he got up in the dark, feeling an unwonted pleased consciousness, as he dressed, of his own strength which made him rise as fresh as ever after only a few hours' sleep. When he got down he found that the rest of the party from the Abbey, not expecting him, had already started for the meeting-place, and he set out to find them. They were to meet on an old stone bridge over the river, half-way between the Abbey and the cottage. In going through the dark fields he missed his way and was perverted by the wide, full brooks to a strange

part of the water-meadows. He felt just sufficient desire to find the others to make him hurry in the pale dark; he thought he would walk home beside Christie.

But, after some time, when he was again beginning to find his way, he met Imogen alone. In this dusk of morning she looked like a wraith whom he did not know, and as they walked together his protective instinct was pleased that she need no longer wander unsafe alone. The light was coming, and he could see the low, grey bridge not far away and a path to take them to it.

"I wasn't quite sure where I was," she said. "I was just thinking of giving it up and going home; and then I thought: supposing I don't even find my way home!"

"Oh, but you surely could have done that," he said to mitigate any uneasiness in her mind.

"Perhaps—but then I might have missed seeing all this!"

"Yes, that would have been a pity," he said. He hated the way she made him feel her high pitch of expectation. And every minute he could see her face more and more.

ii

All that dawn was nothing for him but the dawning of her face clearer and clearer on the world. When they joined the others on the bridge in the curious metallic atmosphere, the clear light was sharp and cool on everyone, but to him it was only her face coming to light; and now that he was no longer at her side he could do nothing but look at her.

She came upon the bridge with her quick, light step. She hardly paused on her explanation of where she had strayed, so eager she was for whatever she could see now; she always so quickly discarded the past for anything that was to come. She leant upon the

parapet, looking round with her wide, innocent, eager eyes, and unconsciously he moved to where he could more perfectly see her as she stood there softly pressed against the parapet. When the sun rose she turned to him to see it with her and met his eyes which he could not withdraw, and they exchanged a long look at last as the sun came out, their eyes finding each other deeper and deeper, their two hearts beating for each other, and, unseen by them, the sun slipped up into the world, and then they all turned to go home.

Fast ahead Jimmy walked with Christian; there was to be a breakfast-party at the Abbey. Among the other visitors who walked back in the cool morning were Clifford and Theo, who had come to the Abbey the day before for a brief stay, but over the gathering there they could every now and then cast a momentary sad constraint because there seemed to be something hard and assumed in their cheerfulness together.

They had not gone far before Victor came running up from behind. He had been searching for Imogen, and there was on his over-expressive face a look of disappointment at having missed her that seemed to be not only just for the time but for always. She gave him a warm, conciliatory smile, she was so happy. She was smiling and radiant during the long, early breakfast on the lawn, and then as the day was growing in heat and they got up from the table where the white cloth and silver and china were dappled with sunlight, she began to move with Mr. Jenner about the garden.

Mr. Jenner liked to show her things, her beauty pleased him so much. She passed away among the last of the tulips standing each in its tall, separate strength, and when some were cut for her and she held them in her hands their leaves were so stiff and fresh that they creaked with any movement or contact. Jimmy saw her standing there between the flaming

segregated tulips, like a flower herself, and he knew that she expected him to go to her.

The peacocks had got into strange places, one on top of the great woodstack piled near the house, another on the garden-wall, where it stood motionless like mosaic; another walked on the lawn maintaining its long, close tail behind it just clear of the ground. He saw that Imogen passed into the shade of the fig-tree; the young figs were like young lambs—they had a kind of awkwardness, thick in the parts where later they should be slender. "Oh, how beautiful you are!" he thought as he looked at her. He turned away and it was a relief to see her no more.

Each day he avoided her, and it was not difficult, for about the country they were all spreading themselves in different pursuits, or they were together in such numbers that her personality could be blurred for him. But in his mind he rarely ceased to be troubled by her. The vision of her always came with the look that he most dreaded; in his mind he always saw her clamorous, her wide, brown eyes for ever unsatisfied, and her mouth appealing. She obtruded on him when he did not want her, and he resented her. He was troubled that having resolved on marriage he yet still had no peace of mind; it was as if something more were required of him. Was he to love Imogen? He felt only dread of her. He could consider quietly about life with Christie; but only to think of Imogen was to be plunged into a breathless turbulent sea of feeling in which he was caught and changed.

iii

Of each new pursuit that he took up Victor tasted the pleasure so deeply that he wondered how he had lived without it. The Abbey afforded him many opportunities which he took with a kind of self-confident zeal; he rode on horseback on the hills, and felt as if

he was the first man who had ever done so; he fished in the river; he played golf with Mr. Jenner, and again had his proud exultation of enjoyment. And in spite of his absorption in Imogen he was still always trying to draw Jimmy into everything, and when he succeeded it was a great delight to him. And all the time he was conscious exactly of Nature, his mind noticing all the beauty with a feeling of extraordinary intimacy. It was a July of splendid, massive, white clouds piled in the sky; all the month he was conscious of these changing clouds which passed in ranks at different heights before the blue sky. He always wanted Jimmy to feel the same happiness and would try to inveigle him out farther and farther to see the early stonework of some distant cottage. He made up an expedition to a little church he had discovered, which stood without any approach among the brooks, barely lifted up from the river, with wild flowers all round it. After the ecclesiastical architecture of the cottages there was by some accident something curiously domestic about the little church; it had a farmhouse window; its Jacobean oak-pews of a pale, bleached colour looked more like cottage fireside seats, and its altar was like a table lately scrubbed. It was so small and so rarely used that it seemed as if it had forgotten how to be a church. Outside an old man was mowing the graves for hay; and there Imogen lagged behind the rest of the party; she could never walk without a thrill of uneasiness among the mounds because she used to believe that they were made by the actual dead bodies. Her least misgiving Victor always divined and was at her side quickly to reassure her with his love.

In the Abbey garden they all spent many hours. Its walls failed always to shut out the distant purple horizon, soft with summer, with low lines of hills like long streaks of cloud. Inside the walls, the flowers had come to their greatest beauty. Once as they stood among a mass of flowers, and Christie spoke of this

part as Theo's garden which she had made herself, Clifford drew near to hear, his face softening into tenderness.

"Did you say this was Theo's?" he questioned her, and he looked with a kind of moved wonder at the flowers, and it suddenly struck Christie with puzzled sadness that Theo ought to have told him that herself.

And late at night Jimmy and Victor often found themselves alone in the library, each at work, Jimmy on his catalogue for Mr. Jenner, and Victor, writing his notes on certain rare books in their own library, which he meant to publish one day. About this time he learnt of the existence in the market of a book which above any other in the world he wanted to perfect that discovery which he intended to write about. It was to be sold shortly in London, and he must be present at the sale. He told no one, but the thought that soon he would be able to show it to Jimmy as his own possession, and that he would then be able to write in a fuller sense his notes of discovery, filled him with excitement. He planned to get these forgotten books printed again in a uniform set of volumes, one volume being his own notes and description. He thought of earning fame and money, things to please Imogen. He wrote far into the night and felt in himself more power than he had ever had before; he knew he was writing to some purpose.

And as they sat there they were both conscious of their old strong content in being together.

iv

Theo was so young and slight-looking that it always seemed incredible to Clifford how such a fairy or such a child could do anything that was not light and easy; and he wondered at her in the garden or at the piano. She looked childish and ineffective, and when she

accomplished anything it always seemed to him that she just barely did it, by accident. He felt this about her playing, he was always in suspense; how could she do it, with those little brown hands that he knew so well?—she would fail, in this very next passage she would fail, she could not do it, with those hands that he knew. But then, as if by accident, she did it always right, and inwardly in his relief he could have laughed to see her little grave, sweet face looking unconcerned, utterly unconscious of his anxiety or of any reason for it. And in the slightest matters he never thought she could quite manage by herself. She had a way of rising early, before her maid came to her, to go out in the dewy morning to her garden; she loved to escape from the attentions of the servants of her old home, who from the housekeeper down worshipped her, and to go off surreptitiously, evading their watchfulness. Clifford lay half-secretly seeing her put up her hair. "No, she can't do it," he thought, "it is all wrong." But in a moment her quick hands had finished and it was right, and he could see her little unconcerned face in the glass, looking as it always did. He always wanted to laugh then, when she was right after all. But any mirth in him had to die in his own breast or else fade away ignominiously under her cold distaste.

She never let him forget. When they loved each other, and he thought such sweetness must purge her mind of its bitterness, he soon learnt that he had only put an intolerable edge on her pain. He was chastened to his very soul. Once in the dark in the night he heard her crying. He lay rigid with regret. He thought that a lifetime would not be long enough in which to repent and to love and to comfort her.

But a state of mind for which a lifetime was not long enough could not quite survive beyond two months of their marriage. His expressions of sorrow having often to be repeated began to come more by

rote, with less passion. This tremendous absorbing repentance that was required of him became to him a great sinister fact in itself quite detached from his sin —so great that to search in it for his sin would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack. His sin had its appointed measure of expiation; he felt so clean and free that he must have paid it. Now, however willing he might be to suffer for ever for Theo's pain, he had to force his repentance, to assume it with an effort, for it was against the true unalterable nature of things that it should oppress him for ever. He began to appeal to her and argue with her; at last he accused her of spoiling their lives if she could not clear her mind of that trouble.

"*I* who spoil our lives?" she replied bitterly. "You did that years ago before we met."

Whenever in despair he came back to blaming her for their unhappiness he was angered by this same scornful argument. "It was you who did wrong, and now you make out I am the one to blame!" she said bitterly, but with a faint, childish triumph in her at her own power of argument. And he was angry at the hopeless deadlock this made. He was not clever, he thought a lot of men would have been able to talk to her and make her understand, he was probably going all wrong, blundering clumsily at every step; he began to despair; he only knew he was in the right. He could never be angry with her for long, for soon his anger would be broken in upon by seeing the tight look of suffering on her face, so young, so incapable of it. He knew that the former troubles of her life had been little, innocent, consolable griefs—the parting with a governess she loved, the death of her dog that she had had since she was a child. And he knew that she had never had a secret from Christie, who had always been close at hand for every need. Once, just before they were married, he had begged her to go to Christie.

"She will help you, my darling child," he said then. "Tell her everything."

To see her redden with shame for him struck him to the heart.

"I would rather die than tell anyone," she said, her head drooping, as if she would hide her very self out of the world.

When his great instincts of regret had worn themselves out he tried to continue constant in them by effort instead of by impulse. But it was impossible to be so preoccupied with one idea as Theo expected him to be; the impulse for fresh life and happiness was too strong, he could not always quell it. As he sat opposite to her on their way to the Abbey, and looked out of the window while the train sped through the new country, all his pleasure and hope rose in him to think of these few weeks in Theo's old home before he took her to Manchester to start his work. The rush of the train, the thought of the friends who awaited them at the Abbey, the consciousness of her there alone in the compartment with him, sitting luxuriously in her perfect travelling-clothes, made his heart stir with excitement. "How happy we will be!" he thought. But opposite to him he only saw her repressed, unchanging face as she gazed out of the window, and every hope seemed to die rebelliously in him. She was in her most concentrated mood, and he was afraid of her. He looked through the papers which lay in a pile beside him. Once he began to laugh at something he was reading; he made a little sound; he felt her turn her cold, young eyes on him, and immediately he felt ashamed and afraid, and frowned. For they had by now descended to the mere tyrannical outward detail of emotion. As he went on reading he wanted to laugh again, it was so irresistibly funny, but when he felt himself laughing he threw the paper away for he was afraid of her even while he rebelled.

He had hoped that they would begin anew at the Abbey, but when he found that she would always go alone, instead of their going together to visit her old haunts as he had dreamed, he began to fill up his time alone, sick at heart, but not able to stop his life at an unimportant point some years ago. He still had to live. He went with Victor early in the morning on horseback and was blown through by the weather on the hills. When he came home he thought that Theo ought to feel how new and single he was, how fresh for life with her, how simple for her throughout his being. And when he saw her averted, preoccupied face, he began to make plans for his day away from her. Soon he got the habit of going off with Jimmy or Victor, and at a distance his laugh rang out, his great shout of lazy, happy laughter. On most days he liked to go with Victor over to the cottage. First he asked Theo if she would come out with him.

"Where?" she asked.

"Wherever you like. Is there anything you would like to do?"

"No," she said indifferently.

He felt a faint relief as he began to move off.

"I thought we might walk over to the cottage," he said. "Are you sure you won't come?"

"Why should I see that girl?" said Theo quickly. "I hate the sight of her."

He stood surprised and angry, but always afraid of her.

"You mean Edie Cumming? Why do you hate the sight of her?—you've no reason to."

"Why should I see such a person?" she said, raising her fair, flushed face to him defiantly. "It's no pleasure to me. Surely it isn't necessary for me to go with you."

"No, but you never come anywhere with me—and you see this is such a silly reason."

She glanced at him where he stood, very big in the doorway, his blue eyes looking half-shyly, half-angrily at her from his light-red face, and for a moment she longed to relent and go with him wherever he went. But at once a new look of determination crossed over her face. So he went away, and down the steep town with Victor, and over the wild brooks along the flat road with three gates, strong, grey farms looking down on them from the hills, until they came to the grey cottage near the river.

There Imogen lived through the slow, waiting, summer days, and there was something stirring and sweet in the intimacy of her very presence. And Edie luxuriated in the garden in a striped hammock, where she looked very gay and mocked at Clifford on her old familiar terms, while he lazily provoked her and laughed at her.

So the end of August drew near, and Clifford and Theo were to leave for Manchester; but all anticipation for their future had grown dull in him; he felt they must go blindly on in their unhappiness. He pitied Theo too much to be angry with her, he could only settle down to hopelessness and pity. But he went long, breathless rides, or, taking out a new car of Mr. Jenner's, he sat low and tense in it and drove at a wild pace over the country, and in that way he tasted life.

One evening when Theo was in the garden she looked beyond to where the long road ran away into the purple haze of the summer twilight. Along the road she saw a motor speeding away and she knew that Clifford was in it; and something in the way it seemed to rock itself into space until it quickly became a speck and then nothing, sent a sudden premonition of danger into her heart. She turned back into the garden, which appeared to shine with peace. All here was so still that the only thing to catch her eye with movement was the water-spray revolving near her on the

rich grass. But the water was shed so finely from the spray that it looked only like a film of smoke settling gently in the shining air. The perfect peace of the garden only sharpened that warning of danger she felt for him who was not at her side among its quiet flowers that became grave in the dusk. Full of vague apprehension she went to find Christie, to sit with her.

The dinner-hour came and went and Clifford did not appear. It grew dark and Theo sat pale and trembling with Christie, and at each sound they started and listened, but it was never Clifford. Later a rumour came that a motorist had been killed in a collision twenty miles away, and it reached Theo before they could prevent it. She knew it was Clifford. She lay in Christie's arms.

Long before the messengers which had been sent out to search for him returned, Clifford himself came unobtrusively into the house. He looked dirty and tired and depressed after a bad breakdown on a lonely road, and little prospect of any joy in his home-coming. He wondered where Theo was, but felt half-inclined to avoid her.

When his presence was discovered, and he found what alarm they had been in, the depressed look left his face, and he began to glow a little with the pleasure of a man who suddenly finds he is important after the depression of feeling himself of no value to anyone. Everyone was pressing round him with questions and exclamations, and while he answered he was conscious of Theo almost without looking at her. His heart began to beat fast while he went on smilingly replying to all that was said to him. And because he felt Theo's eyes on him there came on his face the old, shy, awkward look which he used to wear when he first knew her. She did not say much for the rest of the evening, sitting quietly in the great hall where, with everyone in high spirits, there was some fitful

dancing going on. But whenever he glanced at her face, Clifford's heart beat fast; he hardly knew what blind hope it was that reached him from her face, but each time he looked at her he felt a kind of radiant promise.

CHAPTER VIII

i

THE last days of August came with a grand accumulation of heat. Except for the Carmichaels, the Abbey was free of guests. Clifford and Theo were leaving at the end of August, and Mrs. Carmichael in the early part of September. Now there were constant journeys between the Abbey and the cottage.

They spent long hours on the river, and when they stepped down into the punt it was like stepping down a little below the level of the world, and seeing it all newly from beneath. The little low bank assumed an importance because it was slightly raised above them; the golden harvest which came to the edge of the river banks, and which they had been accustomed to see lying beneath them in the flat perspective of fields, they now looked up into as into a forest of gold against the blue sky; they felt low in the world.

When they went out the fields were teeming with labourers gathering in the rich harvest—the mere pasture-fields seemed mysteriously to disappear in the midst of this general activity, as if they did not exist; there was nothing but productiveness. The machinery sounded all day, and the men's voices came through the evening, shouting to one another as they worked late, and their footsteps passing home along the road, while the yellow lamplight began to shine out from Imogen's cottage windows.

Every day the deep gold sun left more and more of its colour in the fields; the mornings and evenings were sometimes obliterated in white mist which rose

from the river and in the low fields; the dew was heavy and the sun tawny and hot, burnishing the earth, so that all day long the earth steamed slightly.

Suddenly in this burning weather there came a different kind of day, grey and chilly, with swift clouds. The wind had left the East where for so long all that it had done was to set the mist of heat hardly moving through the land, and it had gone to the South-West and blew in a sharp, squall-like way, driving the clouds low. About the middle of the day it began to rain, and the party that was out was driven quickly to the cottage for shelter, and imprisoned there for the rest of the day. Victor lit a fire; it looked strange and glamorous in the room. That first fire after the summer seems so rare and warm; never again does the warmth spread so sensibly into the room, nor the flames cast so rich and strange a glamour. Imogen was the last to come in. She took off a little woollen jacket and hung it near the fire, and the damp came out of it in thin steam. She put up her hands to touch her beautiful blown hair. It was strange how her smallest doings were important—impossible Jimmy found it not to watch only her, whoever else might move or speak. He suddenly felt himself shut in the room with her, and it was terrible to him.

All these days he had seen her out of doors; the landscape was very wide, and people were all only a little part of a great space and colour in those large summer days. Now closed in with her in a small room he was conscious of her every moment, the strange intimacy of her presence pressing on him painfully until he could see and feel her in the very midst of his being.

For though what he saw now was only her luxurious ease as she reclined in her chair, her beautiful, golden pallor coloured faintly by the wind and rain, her eyes shining mildly in her contentment with the warmth as it went through her, yet her very peace was too sharp

for him: it drenched him with sweetness. There was nothing of her that was not too poignant for him, not even her repose.

The dusk had suddenly leapt forward by about an hour's difference from yesterday; the lamp was brought in and seemed to show clearer all the sweetness of a hearth and shelter and tenderness and beauty, and a wet dusk outside, and he felt saturated with this atmosphere of close, intimate, interior peace; it was close about his heart. Tea came and made a sudden stir; it was as welcome as it can be only on a long, wet day, and Christie's absence of half an hour was explained by the plate of scones that came in now. Christie could do anything, always exactly forestalling people's inclinations. There was a vase of brilliant marigolds on the well-spread tea-table, and the cottage room seemed to have been made for this good fare, this ease and simplicity. They all began to talk more and to laugh louder, while again and again the cups were passed, and the wind went darting over the flat fields. Then after tea gradually they relapsed again, the forgotten fire sank low and dull, the piano was opened, and Theo sat at it playing one thing after another in a mood of melancholy beauty, Clifford watching her hands moving in the shadows, his heart glowing with new happiness. They all remembered that long day, the fire in summer, and Theo's dreamy plaintive tunes.

The next day Clifford and Theo had gone. September came in with a perfect, mellow day of sunshine, and as the month advanced the weather only grew more unchanging in its mists and heat and colour, though the nights and mornings were sharp. All day at intervals muffled shots rang out, no louder than their own echo, and sometimes a covey of birds whirred up from the woods and hedges, going with their unhurried flight to find new safety, and Mr. Jenner and a party of friends would pass along the

lanes with guns and dogs, and Victor joined them, with his proud, personal exultation in the sport. But when his mother returned to London he had to decide to go with her to keep her company. Also he had a reason for being in town on a certain day at the end of the month, a day that stirred his mind with anticipation each time he thought of it.

ii

Imogen was out of doors looking across the wild-brooks. A single tree stood in the meadow in the late sun. She thought it was a beautiful time to walk for anyone coming from the town. She wondered how anyone longing to see her could keep away on this still, amber evening; no, it was not possible—this could not fail to be the evening. A great flock of pee-wits appeared in the sky; they were so many that they almost frightened her. They moved in a vast, hardly-changing, black pattern; they turned clean about with one mind and then they were white. She watched abstractedly their great flight to and fro, until at last they came too close above with a great noise of wings, and she was afraid, they almost shut out the sky, they were strong and so many. She watched, almost breathless, to know what this great onslaught of wings was to lead to. The little tree stood motionless in the meadow. The great flock of countless birds whirred down upon it and were folded into the little tree and were still. The tree stood small and motionless as before.

One distant meadow had grown perfectly white. The white lay flat and thin and was the exact shape of the meadow and almost as pure as snow. She felt a dampness on her hands and went indoors. As she opened the door she expected to see Jimmy. At every turn she took she was surprised that he was not there.

She had been expecting him every day, but each day more than the last.

She could not understand why he had not come yet, come alone to see her alone. What could prevent him when he must be yearning to come? He could not be much longer now, and her heart beat because time was passing and bringing what was inevitable. She went up into her room. It was still just light, but when she opened her wardrobe the inside was in darkness and her hand wandered, feeling about the soft stuffs. She was in a dream of love, and never had she felt so radiantly blessed by God as now. She felt safe in God's sight from all shadow of sin. She was so shocked to think of the insurgent, undisciplined longings that had been apt to rise in her, that now her pure, single passion came from heaven straight to her heart. She felt about in the cupboard until her hand touched the dress she wanted; no abstraction could make her vague about her dress, or anything but elaborately careful and exacting; she had a genius for suiting her looks in different ways. As she came downstairs she heard someone arrive at the door. With a quick step she went straight to the door. That quick, light step of hers, how it had pressed always ahead, carrying her impetuously! and how it seemed as if every step she had ever taken in her life had been searching for what she was going to find at the door. She opened it. She saw the night sky and stars and a man standing there. It was Victor come to say good-bye.

She was fretful and exacting with him, a mood of hers that he dreaded. As the evening went on he relapsed into an angry, proud silence—but what was pride now would be such merciless suffering as soon as he had gone from her! Edie left them alone, and it was horrible to him—the sense of being given opportunities for tenderness which they yet did not use.

"When will you be back?" she asked.

"I am going indefinitely," he replied stiffly, exaggerating.

"It will be nice when you are back again," she said in a way that made him furious.

"For God's sake don't be so polite, Imogen," he said angrily.

"I'm sorry," she said nervously, for she was always stirred by his anger. A faint glow of excitement came over her. From the moment when she found it was not Jimmy at the door the sense of her radiant goodness had left her absolutely. From now onwards, whenever she missed Jimmy, she at once felt her most violent need of excitement.

"You will be going to nice places and seeing all the shops," she said discontentedly.

"Are you tired of being here?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so, but—oh at this minute I wish I was in London!"

He knew so well these vague discontents and vague excitements of hers. They always pained him in the very depths of his soul, because they showed how she still had not the security and happiness of love. And yet also it was these very moods of hers which opened the way for his love-making, for now she was not strict and scrupulous in that sweet ostentatious way that he loved in her with all his tender, humorous devotion: instead she was passionately needing excitement and full of indulgence to herself; and as he did not know what was the way to her love, he took what way he could. He was tortured with waiting in suspense for her. Oh the balm for him when he felt her soft, yielding face close to his, and he could kiss her once before she got up and left him.

iii

The reduced numbers at the Abbey threw Jimmy more with Christian, but with her, as with other

people, he was able to preserve a curiously unchanging relation, so superficial that it hardly allowed of development. He had not yet finished with the books here, and he stayed on, doing his work, after his mother and Victor had left.

By now the fruit was big in the garden. There was an apple orchard at the back of the house. It was not old but had been planted with two kinds of apples by Mr. Jenner himself only a few years ago. The trees were not more than ten feet high, but they were thick with leaves and apples. The apples had been chosen for their looks, one kind was crimson, the other yellow like shining pale moons. It happened that as they were placed, and with their colour, they made anyone coming on them suddenly, stop and catch his breath. More beautiful than any of the flowers in the garden were the lustrous, glimmering apples.

He always liked to be with Christie. Once he came in from a walk in the late grey afternoon and went straight to her sitting-room thinking she would be alone, and found Imogen there too. Christie was playing the piano and a tall lamp had been lit though some daylight still came in on the white walls and thick, blue carpet and chintz-covered furniture. Christie was playing in a careful way to learn something to please her father who missed Theo's playing, and she only smiled quickly at him as he came in. Imogen was standing at the piano; to him, coming in from the grey, solemn fields, she appeared a figure strangely unnatural; her hair was beautifully and elaborately done, and she wore a silk jacket of a garish magenta colour that suited her. Her hands were resting in its pockets; she had evidently been strolling carelessly about, and was only standing at the piano on her way, for there was a kind of arrested movement in her pose, and as he saw her first her face was still half-smiling with expression as she hummed the tune. It all looked to him so separate from the immediate past

in the fields, as if it were something on the stage. He met Christie's welcoming look and went to sit down, but from the moment he came in Imogen stood fixed, a captive in her fleeting movement; even the expression of her face as she half-smiled with the tune appeared fixed, but pathetic, as if it were afraid to go or stay. He sat down. Christie played on, and Imogen stood exposed before him; it seemed to him that he had nothing else to look at, and she felt she had no shelter anywhere from his eyes. Her eyes went slowly to meet his. Oh those long dumb looks they exchanged! —each was more helpless and cruel than the last, if that was to be all, if she was to have nothing else!

When Imogen went home that evening she was so listless and sad that Edie wondered if she wanted to return to town, a move for which Edie herself was quite prepared. And though Imogen said she did not want to go yet, she did begin to revive with talk of what they should do in town when they went there. They spoke of the clothes she must buy; she began by mentioning a few things, but gradually more and more came into her mind, with the inventive ideas she had for clothes; the mere lavish plans she made seemed to appease her. They were looking at a certain American fashion-paper, where the alluring drawings gave a wonderful exaggerated impression of charm. Imogen did not speak much in praise of them; her remarks were only shrewd and knowing.

"There's not much in that," she said as they paused on a page; "one could do that in no time."

But her face flushed with interest as she bent over the paper.

But the next day she was drooping and languishing; time seemed to her hardly to move, and her sense of the slowness of the passing hours so communicated itself through the cottage that even the maid was oppressed by the length of time and wondered if the clock had stopped. Imogen's frequent glances at the

clock, her sighs, her going from one thing to another showed how tired she was of this day, how she longed for the empty hours to pass, not at this leaden pace, but rapidly.

In the interminable hours between tea and dinner she stood sadly at the window, dreading the beautiful melancholy autumn evening that yet must come before it could go. Imogen was so like an importunate child in her discontent that all she longed for was for it to be to-morrow. She had an incurable expectation of the future; only the present was dull and cruel to her.

Then suddenly as she looked out a wave of colour came into her face. She gazed with her soft, shining eyes into the space outside.

For Jimmy had come at last.

CHAPTER IX

i

In one way they had gone so far, in another way they were almost strangers; at first neither of them knew in which language when they found themselves alone they would speak. His invitation to her to come out for a walk was formal—but they were going out to find their perfect solitude, their other speech, she knew. She knew it at every step as they walked through the meadows, when her hand also would go up quickly to the gates he opened, and once when they retraced a few steps, deciding they had come the wrong way, they both instinctively hurried to make up the time, as if they had got late for something, so conscious were they both of their fixed end.

When it came, and she felt his arms round her, she could have cried out with her sharp sense of perfect salvation. His arms, how they held her! There would never be a moment of her life like this when her first perfect passion was approved in her soul, and she was a flame of pure love. And to Jimmy the hour was so breathless that though he had to speak the mere sound of words brought a pain of estrangement.

"What is there like you in the world?" he said with an effort, with pain in his voice. "Imogen! such sweetness I feel, can you feel it too? Imogen, are you happy?"

He looked at her in her pride and glory and knew her happiness.

They felt alone in the autumn evening, alone in the world with this strange ecstasy of sweetness between

them. The sweetness was in their most secret being, a sharp, personal ecstasy. Now the blue autumn world all around them seemed to be preparing for intense quiet and darkness. It was as if they had at last sent it to its peace and rest. In the past it had jerked them and urged them with a sense of its opportunities; now it sank into mystery and stillness while their two hearts palpitated in the great space.

ii

It took him two days to feel his way back to his old level; he groped his way back to his old lethargy, coming to it with a sense of extraordinary relief. He had never been used to think things out; he thought very little of Imogen now, but with his blind obstinate instinct he sought to be as he had been before. To come again on his old habits of quiescence and sufficiency brought him a relieved sense of extrication.

She hindered him in his escape, but she could not stop him. She kept rousing in him more feeling than he wished to have, for though in those next few days he did not see her alone and established a strangeness between them, yet by her very presence she could impart a kind of passionate unrest; it was not that she was gloomy or morbid, but that she was never insignificant; her very laughter was moving because it came so quickly, the unimportant conventional things she said had a kind of shy eagerness, her gratitude was exaggerated. To be with Jimmy was to be constantly receiving little services from him; his kindness came naturally and he liked exceedingly to do something that secured another person's comfort and ease. Many times a day someone was grateful to him—but not as Imogen was grateful. Her glow of pleasure was beautiful but unnatural like a tropical flower; it was in advance of what there was reason for, because she was always being caught in a glow of

her own passionate life and love, and confusing that with the little pleasures that were bestowed on her from outside.

But when Jimmy had completed his own release he could not rest in it. In the very midst of his self-congratulatory sense of escape, he had to find happiness with Imogen again, so suddenly that he hardly knew his own intention. He went to see her and they sat together indoors by the fire. If life could have gone on like that till the end, time and thought suspended, nothing but this deepening discovery of sweetness!

But these minutes would end and what would come after them? To Imogen there occurred the incredible chance that there might come more days of silence and mystery. She had been puzzled and unhappy. With a kind of unconscious disingenuousness she began to speak to him. She still held his hands but drew back from him, and in the firelight he saw that her face was lovely in its happiness. She spoke of her love as if to teach him to speak of his.

"Listen," she said, passionately impressive, "I want to tell you, I have never loved anyone before I loved you!"

What was his deepening silence—was it the very perfection of content?

At last he spoke, with a look of terrible uneasiness. He could look more uneasy than anyone in the world, because at the point where other people passed to grief he still only showed uneasiness stretched to its utmost.

"I wish I could be like you, Imogen," he said, "so unselfish and brave and loving."

"You do love me?" she asked quickly.

"I'm not sure, I can't explain, I ought to go away, I oughtn't to hurt you like this. But, Imogen!"

"Yes?"

"You are the only happiness I have ever known or shall ever know."

"Then don't leave me!" she said breathlessly.

"But when I look ahead it all seems a muddle. I suppose I'm a coward, I can't face everything; I don't want to feel. You'd better not think of me, Imogen."

"No?" she said in obedience, but horror overcame her and she began to cry.

"No, don't cry," he begged her, possessed by a fever of uneasiness at the sight of her tears. There came to him his old inevitable longing to escape from the sight of pain, but he sat on beside her until she herself could not endure the strain and told him to go.

In the very instant of his closing the door her mind flashed in a quick search for distraction. She called Edie, and a note was sent into the town inviting the doctor to come to dinner with them. All the evening Imogen was very beautiful and alluring, and in the young man's adoration she could as it were see reflected her own beauty and glamour. In her excitement she was not so much seeing him as watching a reflection of her own looks and ways, as if she were seeing herself in a glass.

Ever since he first met her the young doctor had been persistently at hand, and his love was like a secret cried aloud by his every look. He was exceedingly young and fresh and he was simply swept off his feet. He had a mother and a sister. Imogen remembered them now. To her the young man was some one whom she could hardly attend to in himself—he was merely a figure on the outskirts of her life, some one whose only importance was the sense of being loved that he produced in her. But she remembered how when she met his mother and sister at a tennis party they had looked at her in a kind of radiant wonder, because their boy loved her. He might be nothing to her, but he was their whole world. They had looked at her as if the whole of romance were centred in her and in their boy's love. She remembered now exactly how they had looked.

When it was late and he was gone and she went to bed her excitement had all fallen away from her; she began to shiver with fear and unhappiness, and soon tears were falling down her face as despair came upon her mercilessly. Generally she made a long luxurious preparation for bed. To-night her clothes fell about her in a little thin heap upon the floor, her numb fingers hardly touching them to help them to fall, and soon she lay upon the bed.

iii

She began to realize that Jimmy always came back to her. He came to her because he must; he had never before in his life acted against the safeguarding of his own detachment as now when he went to Imogen, but after being with her his blind will again restored him, he again made himself safe and tight. He then spent hours taking pleasure in his work, the conversations he had with Mr. Jenner on public matters or about the books were never too long for him, and he took good-humoured satisfaction in the easy, increasing cynicism of his own remarks. So what Imogen had to fight was this inherent deadly enemy, Jimmy's old-established revolt against feeling.

But nowadays Jimmy was never secure in his detachment. It could suddenly be shattered by his passionate joy in Imogen, or more insidiously it could be preyed upon by the thought of life slipping swiftly by.

His dog had become old and infirm. Once when Jimmy was out with Daisy this decline which he had been so loth to see was at last forced violently on his notice. They had walked a long way, too far, and as they came back Daisy went slower and slower until at last she could hardly crawl along the road. Then Jimmy was obliged to take her up in his arms and carry her. She was large and heavy, and he had to

walk for a mile, sometimes stumbling with her in the dark. Her weight made him suffer, not on his own account but for her, for as he held her he could feel how her weight made his arms press into her; wherever he held her, always trying for a new grasp, he felt that it was the wrong place, pressing her, hurting her. All the time his grasp felt to him awkward and cruel.

"Daisy!" he kept saying low to her in the dark. "Daisy!"—asking for forgiveness.

At last he reached the Abbey and Christie was in distress for him as he saw the dog failing under his eyes. Imogen was there too, and she felt a dumb, passionate grief, but hidden away in her soul there was a sudden strength and hope when she saw his helpless pain on his face—something that he could not harden or fly from.

However perfect were many hours that they had together, he never felt fixed in his love for Imogen, and however passionate a tenderness could rise in him at the bidding of his own instincts it was recalcitrant and unwilling if he felt an appeal from her. And she was on the verge of appeals. For sometimes a kind of lovely light would come over her mind, when she would suddenly see clearly some way of fixing his love. Did he know that there were other men who loved her? Of Victor she could never have spoken to him. That lover was a secret which for some reason she could never utter to any other human being. With all that was often superficially cruel and trivial between herself and Victor, she yet felt a deep awe for his tempestuous eternal love, and not to anyone could she say a word about Victor; that was a secret which lived in a deep, awed place in her heart.

But there were others. For many years she had been loved, one man here, another there, one going, another coming, with a process for her always the same—first expectancy and then disappointment, and then the steeling of all her religion and goodness to

save herself from a more voluptuous indulgence in the excitement of being loved, and therefore from having a grieved, shocked conscience. And sometimes she wanted Jimmy to know, not about Victor—never a word to anyone of him—but about these other men. She wanted to tell him that unless she could love him there was no safety or simplicity for her; she thought that this knowledge would put a seal upon his tenderness for ever. But never could she come to say what was in her heart. His manner revolted in some strange, nameless way from confidences, as it had always done in the past. Always he had wanted nothing special in anyone's treatment of him.

CHAPTER X

i

WHEN Victor and his mother made their journey to London the trains and the stations were thronged with people come to the end of their holidays, and Victor felt himself included in a general atmosphere of permanent return to town; it was a migration of which he was an implicit part. He had set out on his journey with a great important hope of something he was about to accomplish, but as he came into London through the miserable backs of houses it did not seem a place in regard to which a single ambition could be cherished. He had started out on a brief, fruitful visit, but on every side of him that atmosphere of a permanent exodus from the country was established, he was engulfed in it, and it seemed to impose on him a long parting with Imogen. He realized heavily that he and Imogen were far apart. And was it only in this space of miles, or was it not far more than that?

He began to recover his spirits soon after his return to town. In regard to Imogen, instead of despairing he began to take an extraordinary sweetness of comfort from the thought of his own deficiencies. She could not love him as he was. He kept remembering things to his disadvantage, his rage, his violence, his having no position in the world, nothing standing to his name, no fortune to offer her. The more he abased himself the happier he grew. She would only love him at his best. Once the horror was explained it almost ceased to exist. Any foolishness or violence of his that he could recall he dwelt on with shame but also with

happiness. And there was nothing that he could not change. He knew she would love him when he was different. He only longed to be with her quickly now, for at every hour of the day, every time he spoke, at every turn he took in a street, his heart was calling out for a new beginning with Imogen.

And then London had done more than remove the depressing, sordid impression that had baffled him in the train. Now as he took up again his old familiarity with its busiest streets and the jostle of crowds, and had the sense of all interest and all learning being within a little packed compass here, it was not difficult to feel that it contained the answer to every ambition. And for him it held somewhere at this moment a treasure that was going to help him to achievement.

He had reached an age when it is a pain and an indignity to have no record of work. And now that he had in view a task that he loved, his longing to accomplish it was so great that though he had waited for part of a lifetime he could hardly wait for these few days more. In three days' time the sale was to take place of the book that he wanted. Reading its pages he would complete that special keen knowledge which he had unearthed in other books and which he was going to give to the world. It was not mere specialized bibliographical information; it was discovery and romance, it was for anyone to read and be interested. He knew his good fortune in this little mine he had struck, how it would lift him into the realm of those who worked to some purpose, to the world's gain.

But three days before the sale he had his first fear that his money would not reach him in time. The book was to be sold not alone but in a lot, and there was no sign in the catalogue that its exquisite rarity and distinction, the very thought of which thrilled him with excitement, had been suspected. Not that Victor deceived himself for a moment that

this entry in the catalogue would have escaped the notice of other collectors; he knew better than that; he knew how many there must be who were quietly and tensely waiting. He had, therefore, realized the necessity of providing himself with a large sum of money, but, in that strange ineffective way of his, the mere determination had been so proud and hopeful and buoyant that the performance of it he had let slip until there was barely time. He had now taken steps to withdraw a hundred and fifty pounds of his capital, but during these three days he lived in a state of increasing suspense waiting for the money which did not come. What folly had made him risk all his hopes? There was no credit given in a sale-room, and when the night before the sale he found that his mother could not at short notice supply him with that sum he cursed violently to himself because he was faced with a maddening defeat. If by now he did not spend so much fury on people as he used to do, he could still be in the most violent impotent rage against the world, defying it, cursing it, resolved to be even yet with a malignant fate. The next morning, just in time, his money came.

The sale began at two, but a good while before that Victor had taken up his place standing against the wall, his catalogue in his hand, his bright blue eyes ranging over the familiar scene before him. The places at the table beneath the auctioneer's stand were quickly filled, all the faces there were known to him—his custom during the last year or two of attending sales had made him familiar with every look and habit of those dealers; he knew exactly the idiosyncrasy of each one's manner of bidding; he knew the good-humoured, yet slightly guarded, terms on which they all met together there, he one of them, he also very ready to laugh at the bantering jokes which went round, and he also with his secret hope and peril buried out of sight. Round the walls stood more and more men.

He did not know which he feared the most—those whose faces he knew, whose cupidity he was already familiar with, or those who were strange to him.

And yet, deep in his heart, he had the assurance of safety. Many people might bid for the book in its rarity, and be willing to pay a good deal of money for it, but not to anyone was it worth all that it was worth to him; no one else here had the incentive to buy it that he had. Only the possessor of a few other books of the utmost rarity could have had the opportunity to link this book with those others, to discover a wonderful unsuspected identity for it. In the library at home there were the volumes that gave the key to this one. He could not really fear that anyone else here had his special reason for bidding high for this one lot, number fifty-nine, in a long sale that was full of books tempting to dealers. And yet until the book actually lay in his hands he would feel this touch-and-go of panic in his heart.

The sale began and the room was now closely packed with a silent crowd, while the auctioneer's voice drummed on, the only sound that seemed to have a right and privilege and empire: any other sound was slightly shocking, any other human voice raised suddenly to call a bid could be embarrassing, if not almost ignominious, as humanity can so quickly be. The only authentic sound was the auctioneer's voice.

It was not a very large room, and the crowd was now dense. What had been a favourable position when Victor had made his choice in the leisurely space was now nothing but a few cramped inches of standing-room; he was pressed to the wall, shoulders touching his on either side and stolid backs in front of him. Yet still opposite to him the hidden door would open from time to time and there would be the faint, unseen stir of a new entry.

When he heard the details of lot fifty-nine read out

by the auctioneer he began to feel impossibly stifled and hemmed in, as if he must raise his confined arms and scatter the crowd where it most immediately oppressed him. The bidding for his lot had begun, and was going briskly, but he had not joined in yet. To reduce the appearance of competition he would only join in at the moment when the lot was in danger of falling to some one else. He could hardly breathe, he was so hemmed in. Suddenly those who were close to him felt his violent stir as his voice rang out strangely:

"Thirty guineas!"

The auctioneer turned quickly and found him, and the bidding progressed, Victor signing to him again and again; through a mere chink in the other faces the auctioneer found him sharply each time.

At seventy pounds there was a pause, the opposing bidder was flagging, once again he might rise but not more. Victor could just catch sight of him, a stranger, with a curious heated look of reluctance and disappointment. In the excitement of this struggle Victor had no mind for pity. The bidding had gone higher than he expected, but not too high for him; now he would have liked to relieve his long tension by a smile at the mixed desire and caution on the man's face, which told how very little farther he would go. And then suddenly a new bidder joined in.

From that moment Victor went on bidding blindly, in terror. He could not see this time who was opposing him, but he felt the hard, indomitable progress of a will against his. Each time he nodded, slowly, in terror, the auctioneer's look came bounding back on him again, sharp and direct like a blow, with that other will behind it, quick and certain. He heard the call of figures that he could hardly believe in—eighty, eighty-five, ninety, ninety-five; he felt a blind fury of hate, it passed over his brain like a delirium—wild, useless passion. Once again he nodded, and in the

midst of a stir of excitement and surprise in the room the auctioneer said:

"One hundred pounds."

On went the bidding as if there would be nothing to check it. The only periods were those which the reaching of a round figure seemed to make.

"One hundred and fifty pounds!" said the auctioneer.

"Guineas!" came the quick, merciless response, and at last at the sound of that voice Victor turned sharply to locate the exact spot where his antagonist stood. In that flash of time when he heard that voice he saw Jimmy.

He bid once more, though he had not the money; he was dazed, he thought this one more bid of his might make Jimmy despair—perhaps he, too, had come to the end of his resources. But a sudden mental vision of Mr. Jenner's money came to Victor; he saw it spreading away into infinity. He turned away sick at heart and pressed his way out of the room. At the door he was joined by Jimmy.

ii

An hour later Victor said good-bye to his mother at the flat and went out for a walk before he was to meet Jimmy at the station; Jimmy was up only for the day and they were going to return to Norton together this afternoon.

As he walked he was very glad to be away from Jimmy for a little while, and yet never had he loved him more. All that he had ever loved in Jimmy he had seen at its clearest in this little time they had just spent together. First as they had come out of the sale-room, and Jimmy had realized with surprise who it was he had defeated, his old friendly, bantering mood had been not only bearable, it had been just what Victor had always loved from him and must love even now.

"Was it you?" Jimmy had said with his perfectly modulated surprise. He smiled slowly. "Why didn't you bid up a bit? We didn't even get *going!*"

And Victor had smiled back. But something of what he had been through must have showed on his face when Jimmy spoke of Mr. Jenner's enthusiasm for the book and of the use he meant Jimmy to put it to. For he suddenly asked Victor uneasily if he was disappointed. And while Victor walked now he could still hear that attractive, uneasy voice saying:

"Look here, are you sure?"

As he recalled this Victor had on his face again a little trace of the smile with which he had reassured Jimmy. He had a beautiful, unusual smile with a deep, unconscious tenderness and sadness in it.

And Jimmy had always been one who was quickly and easily reassured.

He walked along Piccadilly and then up Regent Street and down Bond Street. What was this feeling surging up in him as he walked quickly in the autumn sunshine and felt the pleasant cold just strike the surface of him like a baptism to his spirit? When he thought he was broken with disappointment he found in himself only hope and joy. Was this joy in life unconquerable in him? In his life he had suffered many disappointments, and this was his worst, most irrecoverable, loss. And yet still he was overwhelmed with worship of all that was left. When he had missed anything it had always been bitter just in the moment of loss, but in reality it was only like a rich man losing a sovereign; a disappointment could never make him feel that he was anything less or that the world was anything less. And now with this touch of ice in the air striking his face thinly in the bleak autumn sunshine what could he regret? There did not seem to be any consideration that could stand beside the presence of Imogen in the world, the thought of whom struck his heart with almost more

joy than he could bear. He loved Imogen with a deep soul, he loved her as few people can ever love.

He was glad he had come out, for no trace of the nervous tension in the sale-room could survive this fine movement. Suddenly he remembered that he had a hundred and fifty pounds in notes in his pocket.

It pleased him when a beautiful face passed him; he noticed how sparkling and rosy a face could look on the cold day above a deep lustrous fur; he could not take his eyes from such a face until it was well past. In a good suit he himself felt slightly at an advantage because he was not wearing an overcoat; it was one of those cold days when that omission is somehow a smartness in itself. Every now and then he stopped for a moment in front of a shop when something caught his eye, and once he found himself looking through narrow iron bars at a dazzling window, where ladies' headless, white velvet necks on little black stands were encircled by rows of pearls, and magnificent rings lay in little cuts in a white velvet bed. This time he did not pass on though he hardly knew what kept him there; he was rarely conscious of the coming or going of thoughts of Imogen, something of her was always static in his mind; she only came nearer, she never went. And now he was remembering how once when she thought she had lost her pearls she had given a little cry and turned pale; he remembered her dazed, unguarded look of loss, and how she had not heard what was said to her but had only begun her distracted, passionate search. How well he could recall her look, as indeed he could recall every look he had ever seen on that face. He was still thinking of this as he went into the shop; he did not know at what moment he had determined to go in, nor at what moment he had decided just which jewel he was going to buy. The coincidence of his being able to get it for exactly a hundred and fifty pounds did not decide him—he was already so decided—it merely

pleased and amused him. It was a diamond brooch; it was fine and resplendent, made in the shape of a star; he felt a thrill of excitement as he put it in his pocket, and as he walked out of the shop he was dazed with happiness at what he had done.

Getting into a taxi he reached Paddington only just in time, and each with his different burden in his pocket he and Jimmy travelled back to Norton.

From the station they had a long drive, rising over the Cotswolds and descending again into the valley. It was very still and the mist was rising everywhere this evening and the autumn sunset was a flaming red. As they drew into the grey town every cottage chimney was sending out a column of smoke that hardly ascended into the air but stayed enclosed in the steepness of the street; the single street went long and straight and wide up into the sky. Horses passing up or down were steaming their heat out on to the cold air. Above this vaporous earth the sky each minute grew more luridly red, the eastern horizon more sombre and purple. They turned indoors out of the dusky, smoky world.

CHAPTER XI

i

WHEN Victor returned to Norton it was only for three days; the Jenners were going back to town at the end of that time, and Edie and Imogen too.

When he had first seen Imogen again she had seemed changed—as changed as a gardener would find his garden if he had left it for a few weeks at a certain time in a warm spring. He had not given her the brooch then; those first two days had been like a pause in his life while he waited, not knowing what had changed her or how she was changed; he felt she was exalted and he as it were held his breath. But on the third day he saw a return of her fitful discontent. His heart at once leapt to its old office, it became a well of tenderness and compassion, waiting, if only she would come to be refreshed in his love. He gave her the brooch that day when she seemed restless with discontent.

It was the last day and there was to be a dinner-party at the Abbey. Imogen came indoors after parting with Victor, who went back to the Abbey to dress. Directly she left Victor she began to think of Jimmy, absorbingly and painfully. For some time she had been waiting for him to come, exalted in her love and certainty, but never had he been so long, and to-day her patience was outworn. She and Edie went together up to her bedroom. All the candles were lighted in the little white room, the maid brought hot water which stood steaming in the basin, Edie began to get out things and to lay them on the bed, and a little

comfort and expectation came at last to Imogen; she would at least enjoy dressing.

But she still had on her outdoor things, and as she went to the glass Edie stood beside her, and the same thought came to them both, seeing the reflection there—that Imogen could not be more beautiful than she chanced to be at this minute. She had on a little black velvet hat like a cowboy's in shape with one pheasant's feather of a daring length, beneath which her skin looked very fair, her eyes were starry, her hair blown about. Edie loved her like this so much that suddenly all the preparations they were about to make seemed foolish since the first act must be to undo a beauty more perfect than what would be achieved at the end. Imogen put up her arms to take off her hat and Edie watched the undoing of that perfect chance or mood of beauty which Imogen had brought in with her from the weather outside.

There was an extra unspoken tenderness between them because it was their last night together. This return to town had been accepted by them both as the inevitable occasion of their separation; they could not live together always, and the idea that Imogen should return with Edie to her lodgings was not entertained by anyone, instinctively put aside as unfit. Christie had never said a word to influence the chances of that parting, which she knew would be full of pain to Edie. But once it was tacitly agreed upon she loved to plan what would be happiest for Imogen, and it was arranged that she should stay for a time with her and her father in London.

In spite of all the persuasions that had been heaped upon her, Edie would not come to the party to-night. Now, when Imogen appealed to her for the last time to come, the resolute loving look with which she refused was suddenly dimmed by tears for this and all their other partings.

"Dearie!" she exclaimed through her tears. "You

know I always want to do what you want me to. But I feel what I call a fish out of water up there, if you can understand the term. I'm not feeling up to very much and I'll have a good lay down with a book until you come home."

It was when she was left alone to finish her dressing that Imogen remembered that Victor had put something into her hand when they parted. She did not at this moment cross over the room to where she had laid it down, but as she went on with what she was doing the faint curiosity with which she had remembered it gradually increased, until the clamorous mood to which her nature was prone found here at last a mark, an object to fill the disappointment and dreariness, and she fell on a state of passionate expectation on account of the little box lying on the bed.

She had on a low black dress made of something so fine that she appeared perishable and frail. Her clothing was generally nothing but the frailest covering, a few gossamer layers that gave an exquisite sense of fineness and delicacy. She went to the bed and opened the box, she breathed hard, there was half a sheet of notepaper which she glanced at and threw aside, her quick fingers unwrapping the box. On the piece of paper she read:

"*My dearest love.*"

It was written small and alone in Victor's beautiful handwriting, which was like that of an old manuscript; it just gave her a fleeting impression of his ardent single passion; she was just aware, though she would not pause on it, of how those words stood for a devotion that was noble and wild and everlasting. But her fingers had laid bare the large bright star, she drew a long breath and a look of pure happiness came over her face. She put it to her breast, where it just caught her dress together with its shining rays. Nothing was missed to her of its beauty as she gazed in the glass, of its perfect appropriateness in that

place, a single purposeful star in darkness. She knew all its beauty and all her happiness.

It was some time before she would listen to a voice that said: It would be cruel and selfish to take this. She had always given way to excitement when Jimmy had failed her, and it was only too easy to give way now. She was tempted where she was most vulnerable, least able to resist; the possession of this jewel sent such a thrill of pride and satisfaction through her that she felt above Jimmy, above all despair and waiting. Jimmy had been cruel to her, but she need not care.

But because the temptation was so great her conscience was raising a great protest even against her will. "I love him!" she thought tragically, and she knew that was her soul's greatest truth and that all weakness and passion and vanity must be sacrificed to that. She had the habit of strict religious thought, and once a thing had fallen under the name of "temptation" in the vernacular of her religious ideas, it was almost sure to be overcome—the very word stirred her as much now to a strict, shocked resistance as it had done when she was a child in a convent school learning her first simple morality. With passionate longing she might keep the star at her breast and even hold it there as if she were pleading that it should remain, but once her conscience had called it sin and vanity she knew she must sacrifice it to her other pure love. "I love him, I love him!" she thought over and over again. She laid down the brooch and clasped her hands together, partly in sorrow, partly in exaltation, because she could do even this for him. Her whole spirit shone in the truth and light of its love for Jimmy. Her love had won, she felt as if she were in Jimmy's arms.

Suddenly she paused, as if a cold hand were laid upon her. She had made her sacrifice, but did Jimmy demand it or care whether she made it or not? She

now felt as Abraham might have felt if he had sacrificed Isaac and then found his God had been inattentive.

ii

In the garden after dinner the earth was effaced, not so much that it was dark as that the sky was a panorama which alone lured man's eyes. The sky was a pale world of milkiness and cloud, and on this side of that world a thin rain began to fall, and on the other the full moon shone wanly.

The rain made a reason for Jimmy to turn again towards the house to lead Imogen to shelter from its stray cool points. She had a flimsy wrap that a very little rain would flatten to her body, and he had nothing to give her.

"You will hardly need your coat," she had said to him in her tender voice as they came out. Her voice could make him close his heart.

But for one last time he must stop her beneath a thin-leaved tree for their shy personal joy to lull them away beyond all pain and doubt. As he touched her hand she thought of her sacrifice; to her it was like a great claim and bond between them, and because she could not keep it in silence she began to tell him how for this love she could give up everything, could resist all weakness and wanted no other joy in the world.

The spell was broken, as all at once he became only conscious of how he was embroiled in what was perilous and untamed! The idea of escape was close and familiar to him, he had never let it go, and now when he was confronted by the weary, thrilling gamut of her emotions and knew how his own emotions could rise intolerably in answer to her call if he would let them, he thought of escape and felt how safe, how quiet it would be.

For in that minute when she seemed to be making her appeal, Jimmy saw like a flash what the abandon-

ment of his detachment meant to him. He stood in that moment on the brink of terror and joy. He saw how he could have met her confidence with fervour, tenderness with tenderness, passion with passion, her soul with his soul; he was appalled with that vision of how his being could have met her, of how all that was dead in him could have become quick. His face grew white and tortured in a sudden fury of resistance.

"For God's sake leave me—let me go!" he broke out.

Imogen gazed at him. She had never seen such terror of reluctance on a human face. Her heart froze with fear, but she put her weak, helpless arms about him and murmured brokenly:

"You can't leave me, my dear, my dear, you can't go away and leave me."

"I wish to God it was different," said Jimmy. "But you don't understand—this is impossible." They talked on, the deadly hurt passing between them in their broken, passionate words, while Imogen grew more pale and dazed and spoke words which seemed to come to her from a great distance, of which she hardly knew the meaning.

"We must have pity on each other," was what she said simply.

And again, as he saw her marble face in the moonlight, her eyes shining with tears that she did not know were there, she uttered the same thing with simple, weary gravity, like a calm rebuke.

"We must have pity on each other," she said, and looked and waited as if in wonder why she had said that, and as if now something would happen to show them both her reason.

But they fell upon that blank negation of opposing desire; when nothing can be said or nothing done, and there is only a silent inevitable parting of the ways.

iii

Imogen sat up in her bed, and on the blind she saw a deep red glow where the sun was rising. The dawn which she had got up in the small hours to see two months ago now came late and lurid, when people were about; it was no longer a mystery taking place in the great silent night, it was part of the day's traffic. Now as the sun rose she heard steps in the road, a child running and calling, and in the cottage the sounds of work. The birds were singing again as in spring. Imogen went to the window and drew the blind and opened it wide. The sun rose in a red-gold glow in the pale, cold, blue sky; the stubble-fields were greyed over so that their gold was dull and subtle. It was the kind of autumn morning when it is not known whether it is cold or whether it is mild—but only that it is fresh. Imogen went back to bed and lay there waiting.

The birds that lived in the eaves flew in and out. Just by the open window she heard the extraordinary closeness of their wings—so strangely close for so shy and wild and secret a sound—as the wings fluttered hard in the poised entry into the difficult nest.

She turned over in her bed and moaned. As shy and wild and secret had been their love. And now it was gone.

All the morning they were preparing to leave, and by the late afternoon they were in London. Only Jimmy was left behind at the Abbey to finish some work. Edie and Imogen drove to Edie's lodging where Imogen was to pick up some trunks, while the Jenners went straight to Belgrave Square. As soon as Edie found herself alone with Imogen she embarked on a series of anecdotes out of the past, nervously trying to cover up the awful presence of Imogen's grief. For so long Edie had been dreading this

parting when she would find herself bereft of all she loved; but now that it had actually come there was not a thought to spare for her own distress on that account; it was wiped out in something far more terrible. And all the time she was talking, talking, and did not stop, her heart on fire with a fierce pride on Imogen's account which would not allow this grief for her beloved. On their way to the lodgings Imogen sat quietly in the cab, while Edie, in a kind of passionate defiance carried on her tales with only a wavering note in her voice from time to time.

"—And there was me sitting there hardly able to keep my face—" Imogen heard these things in flashes, when she came with an effort out of her absorption to take heed. Or later: "I didn't say anything, I only thought the more—" and so on and on went that bright mockery with only an occasional quaver in the voice to show how zealous and how kind it was. For anyone else Edie's voice was hard and querulous, her sharp manner stirring everyone to do her bidding with alacrity. In the lodgings the landlady helped to get Imogen's trunks ready, while Imogen herself sat half lifeless in the little dark sitting-room, powerless to hold off this doom that appalled her with its misery. She heard Edie, sharp and high and querulous, in the next room, and the sound of shifting things. Edie came through in the dark.

"Is it cold?" asked Imogen.

"Yes, dearie, searching," Edie assured her tenderly.

Imogen shivered.

"But in a few minutes now you'll be ready to go," said Edie, "and then soon you'll be safe and warm there."

"It has been a long time," said Imogen.

"What, waiting?"

"No, that we've been together. I remember that day I came. I thought I was unhappy."

"Oh your poor hands," said Edie, touching them.

"I'd have lit the fire if I'd known you were cold like that."

"Will you miss me?" asked Imogen in her still, frozen voice.

Edie turned away and tried to answer; in the cover of the dark she pressed her hands to her face as if to force the bitter pain to wait back for a little while.

"Never mind," she said. "Are you ready? Victor's late."

"I'm ready," said Imogen. She sighed. "So now we must say good-bye."

"Yes. Is that a motor I hear stopping? Yes, there's the bell."

They remained motionless, listening, Imogen sighed again her thrilling sigh, her face was in darkness, only her hands showed like white hopeless ghosts lying on her dark lap.

They heard the landlady shuffling down to the door.

"Put your fur close round, then you won't get cold going out. Have you got everything?"

"Yes, yes, everything."

They heard Victor come in below; he was going to take Imogen to the Jenners'.

"So good-bye," said Imogen. "Good-bye, my little friend!"

"Good-bye."

Victor was coming upstairs, and Imogen got up to go.

"Edie—" she said. She held out those hands that were full of grief. "You won't let me go! This little room—I must stay here with you."

"Oh, my darling," said Edie, sobbing suddenly, "I couldn't let you go."

Victor stood beside them, his protective love was quick and warm around them, sharp with understanding, passionately on Imogen's side to defend her in any circumstance. They hardly had to speak, he was quick to know they would not part, and in a

minute he was on his knees by the fire, and lighting the lamp, and doing for them the things he had done so often. Edie blithely hurried about, and in the next room she and the landlady could now be heard undoing the work they had so lately done. It appeared that the landlady had also been in the country though only for a fortnight.

"Where to?" asked Edie.

"To Midhurst."

But Edie had never heard of it. She reviewed rapidly the names of the places round Norton and this was not one of them, a fact which roused her shrewdest suspicions.

"Can't say I've heard the name," she remarked uncompromisingly.

However as she did not really wish to cast doubt on the landlady's whole story, she added more indulgently:

"Still, I think there's a great many places in the country, don't you?"

Victor worked silently and effectively, until when he went away to take a note to Christie he left behind the comfort and warmth and love he had so often left before.

iv

Every day he came to Imogen. They were cruel with each other. They could not even be as kind as friends because one of them wanted that they should be more than friends. Often his wild, passionate tenderness burst out from him and held her enthralled, and she also had her strong feeling for him—she would have died for him in her true deep affection. And yet in their daily intercourse there happened that which will happen with such unequal love—a kind of cruelty and hostility.

Sometimes they set out on the fine winter days with hope and a half-shy spirit of adventure between them.

He liked to come for her looking nice—he took a certain amount of trouble with his appearance and was affected in his spirits by his clothes. But once when Edie called him handsome he looked utterly ashamed; he did not know how rare and fine his face was, in fact. With all his familiarity with Imogen he could so quickly become shy before her. It had happened several times in the country, that suddenly at a word all his self-confidence would leave him and he stood with a shy embarrassed smile, not meeting Imogen's eye. Sometimes that word had come from Jimmy in his slow, bantering, affectionate way.

"Well, have you caught an eel?" he had asked once when Victor came indoors—for in spite of Victor's grand notions of his own fishing that was all he could catch in the river.

"No," he said, his enthusiasm defiant.

"I suppose it was the eel's turn; you look as if it had caught you," said Jimmy.

And Victor had suddenly become aware of his wetness and of his mud and, indeed, of the doubtful gloriousness of his whole fishing career, and he had given his little shy, ashamed laugh and moved away out of Imogen's sight.

But now, however, shyly or hopefully he set out with Imogen on some of these afternoons to do one of those many things he had in store for her (he did not love London for nothing: he knew where to go for everything best, for pictures and music and streets that had character; and in museums with him the boredom of display could be forgotten in a sense of romance and discovery), they were rarely long together before there crept over them a sadness that was cold and hostile.

Imogen meant all to be well, and she longed for him to be happy; she tried to love him. But something came over her that she could not help. Once when they were in a teashop the idea came to her; suppose

Jimmy were to come in and sit at a table opposite and suddenly look up and meet her eyes, oh then how long, too long, that look would last between them, as they had looked before in what was almost an agony of embarrassment and sweetness. . . . She lifted up her cup with a hand that for the moment was weak, her eyes looked startled and dark with feeling, and she turned with an effort to speak to Victor.

But he always felt her effort, and it was like a blow that surprised him out of the dark. From that moment he could speak to her only with great effort himself, his heart had gone dead, he could not speak out of his heart as he had done till then; the only thing that was easy to say was some violent irritation that rose in him against her. He knew it was not real, but it was something to express, something to feel and say sharply. It infuriated him that she did not eat what was before her.

"Why can't you eat?" he asked.

"I have had some," she said.

He looked at her food which she had idly and listlessly broken up until it looked more than when it was whole. He called the waitress and angrily made her take it away and bring something else; he knew the injustice of his violence to the girl would make Imogen ashamed, and he felt less pain.

One day Imogen gave him back the diamond brooch.

"Don't give it to me yet," she said. She looked so sweet and conscious but so sad that he felt there was no tenderness in the world sufficiently delicate and withdrawing and yet idolizing to meet that conscious sad look. But if ever a human face could express tenderness, his could.

"When I am happier," she said, moved by his look. She grew pale and tears came into her eyes.

"You're not happy, Imogen?"

Their hands clung together.

"Keep up your heart," he begged her with his brave ardent love. "Oh, my little Imogen, keep up your heart."

"Yes."

"If I could give you one hour's happiness, by suffering, by dying——"

"Yes, yes, I know," she said, and wept.

But the next day they went together to hear some music. It was a subscription concert in a drawing-room and someone had sent her tickets. She was apt to set out with too much expectation, which would gradually drop from her before they reached the place. Her expectation was never so real now as it used to be, but she fostered it and exaggerated it to herself. But then it left her, and he felt her heaviness; her depression shrouded her impenetrably, it made the world dark to him, and it was as if his soul went tight with misery.

They came into a large Empire drawing-room and went to the back where the last few rows of gilt chairs were still unfilled. His moods so infected circumstances that what he could tolerate warmly when he was happy he loathed exaggeratedly when he was unhappy. Now he seized on the formality of the arrangements here and the garrulous waiting people to spend his hatred on. He pushed about the chairs in front noisily with his feet.

"I've spoilt one damned line," he said with satisfaction.

She was strictly conventional, and hated his indifference to public observation. She looked away coldly, but he had to hurt her if he could. He went and opened a window and did it in a demonstrative, aggressive way, so that she was ashamed of him. But he took a kind of bitter satisfaction in making a cause of estrangement between them, because that obscured the reality. It gave him a cruel pleasure to violate her strict conventional ideas of behaviour and to

shock and embarrass her; he kept expressing his contempt of modern English compositions, and before the concert was over he made her leave. Outside he abused the performance in dogmatic, violent language in the way that she hated. He made the most of his contempt of this school of music in order to be carried away into language that would shock her. At any price he had to put up a false cause for their misery.

She herself was never violent; if she had been he could have borne it better than her heavy sadness that could be so easily startled or embarrassed or ashamed. She was only too ready to believe that during her absorption in her sadness she had committed some fault or stupidity. One afternoon at the lodgings she went to the door on her way upstairs.

"Don't go up yet," said Victor, ordering her hardly.

She paused, trying to think.

"Why?"

"It's dark, I haven't put your light yet," he said in the same hard tone.

"Oh—I'm sorry," she breathed. And at her voice Victor could have cried out in pain.

She would come out of an absorption with a sudden effort, a wave of shame colouring her face. Victor noticed her sometimes at the Jenners'—her sudden little show of animation which his heart knew was false, the bright colour in her cheeks, her shining eyes looking gaily everywhere.

V

Sometimes he knew in his soul that all this meant that he would not really win her. The most terrible moment of his life was one night when he tried to pray that she might be given to him. And something cold and dark came as it were over the very spirit of prayer, and he simply could not pray to have her, as if it were denied before he spoke.

He fought with his own terror. He could do anything but give in to it. His mind led him on a thousand bypaths—not happy ones by any means, but all of them evading the worst. One strange unexpected deceit his mind fell upon was a kind of bitter triumph in catching her as it were redhanded in the act of not loving him. That was sometimes the crown and summit of his irritation, the thing his irritation was working up to, seeking to attain. He was madly sensitive to the slightest signs. One day when he came in she put aside her book and looked up at him as usual with her quiet, kind smile.

"I'm sorry I'm late!" he said with that fervent affection with which he came to her newly each time.

In her face there was no trace of her having kept an anxious watch. He tried to put down the horrible memory which sprang upon him of the watches he was forced to keep each time they were to meet. Each time as the hour grew near he was sick with longing and suspense, tortured by the slowness of time. So that sometimes he had to say to himself: "What is there to fear? We are going to meet. Nothing could prevent that—nothing but her death or mine. O God, if either of us has got to die soon, let us meet this once first, only this once!" Afterwards there might come anything, and he prayed wildly only for this one meeting in twenty minutes' time—those minutes that yet continued to mock him with their length. An awful sense of contrast came to him now this afternoon as he looked at her.

"I was kept by mother," he said. "Sometimes if she seems to want me I can't bring myself to refuse."

"No, indeed," she said. "Well, where shall we go?"

His brain flared with sudden anger.

"But I don't think I need apologize for my lateness, Imogen, or make any explanation."

"Oh, no," she agreed. She was stupid with him

sometimes because he raised no emotion to quicken her mind.

"Because you wouldn't care a curse if I never came at all," he burst out.

"Why—" she said, flushing and starting with that ready guilty look of hers with which she came fully to life.

"Not a curse," he said angrily.

"How can you say such a thing?"

He watched her putting up her conscientious fight, her genuine feeling for him shocked by his suggestion.

"If you cared for me at all you would be a little sorry that I came two hours late."

"But I am," she said painfully.

"Good God!" he laughed. "Do you know what it would do to me?"

"Victor, forgive me," she said at last, helplessly.

He had her there humble, conciliating. He wanted to drive his triumph farther and farther home.

"You would go almost mad with disappointment. Instead of which you sit here perfectly calm."

"I was reading," she said slowly.

But no, she was not to creep out like that! He was not to be baulked of his triumph by any such plea of hers.

"Perhaps you didn't even know I was late?" he said, very white and insistent.

"Victor, let us go out and not be angry," she pleaded.

"Why can't you answer what I ask?" he said furiously. He pressed her, foreseeing what she would have to reply, almost gloating on his coming triumph over her.

And at last she said, weary and ashamed: "I hadn't noticed."

"Ah, I thought so!" he said, white and tense with victory.

And then suddenly it came to him that this was not triumph, but death rather.

Sometimes when he left her he walked hard, as if he could never tire this energy of pain that glowed in his brain. To everyone who passed him by he looked for some alleviation, some mercy. Out of all human beings, *someone* must be hurrying to him with something to allay this solitude and anguish. There must be someone late and hurrying, whose function it was.

One fine afternoon in the middle of winter he met a woman in the street whom he recognized immediately as Rose Smith. During all this time he had met her at various intervals of years, so that that episode of youth had, as it were, kept up with his life, moving somewhere in mist and vagueness on its outskirts. She, too, had migrated from South Mimms. They had not spoken in all these years, but the fact that they had passed each other in the crowded streets several times had preserved their consciousness and memory of each other. But now Victor stopped.

"Where are you g-going?" he asked.

"I'm going home, I've got a half a day off to-day."

"What do you do?"

"I'm in the dressmaking," she said, with an indignant flash of her great dark eyes. She seemed to be on the point of pouring out invective against her profession, but her own lethargy just staved it off. She had a look of southern passionate discontent, but also she had a southern lethargy. It just faintly caught Victor's attention to see how the flame that leapt in her eyes smouldered and died away into languor that was almost sleepy. He was like a man lying in desperate illness whose attention is caught curiously for a moment as if from a far distance by a movement of the blind.

"Can you stay with me for a little while?" he asked.

"What for?" she said. Her grievance against life was such that she expected pleasure from nothing.

"Oh, a walk or a drive. Anything you like." He began to long for her to agree, and he recovered some of his old insistent manner with her.

"I've got a shocking cold," she complained. "I'd better be getting home while it's light."

"Oh, rot," said Victor. He looked down at her smilingly. "You and your cold! It's only something to grumble at."

"Listen to that," she said discontentedly. "You ask anyone at work. I was hoarse last week."

"No, I don't think I'll go to ask anyone at work. Besides, what's last week got to do with it?" he said. "Come on, we'll have a drive." He could not endure the thought of her not coming.

They got into a taxi and Victor on a sudden impulse gave an address in Chelsea.

"Now this will cure your cold," he said as they flew along in the exhilarating air.

"Kill or cure, as they say," she remarked.

He took her to the Chelsea studio; he wanted her to himself.

"The wrong key," he said, fumbling hurriedly with the lock.

"Try, try, try again," she said, becoming a little interested.

"Damn, I can't see."

"A little perseverance," she remarked.

He went on looking. He had a deadly fear that he had lost it.

"There!" he said, relieved. "It was the last one."

"That's right," she agreed. "It would be."

When they got in he sat down. He felt weak and strange. Rose wandered about the great room, looking at things. It was a vast place, with windows in two opposite walls both fitted with dark, effective blinds which, when they were drawn down, gave full scope to the skylight. Rose went to the front windows; the houses opposite were just the same as

this, but looked a little lower, as houses opposite do. She wandered to the back windows, and Victor joined her because he could not bear her to be so far away from him as that far window.

At the back they looked to a great expanse of western sky above roofs and skylights and endless chimneys and telegraph-poles. From these chimneys the smoke darted sideways at them just below, while a hundred different kinds of cowl, none of them perfect, flew round at a speed which obliterated their shape. It was a no-man's-land of roofs and leads and blackness which, though man had built, he had failed to keep in his reach to control its squalor. The ribs or pieces of the breaking cowls lay scattered on many a ledge. Far away on the horizon there was still a grey mist of endless town, with thin steeples and tall, dim, restless flags. But above that there was light flooding the gold western sky.

"Do you ever have tea here?" she asked.

"No."

"Do you know what I had for lunch?"

"What did you have for lunch?"

"They give you bread and cheese."

When Victor spoke to her he had a curious inclination to stammer as he had not done for years—perhaps because he stammered in the days when he knew her.

"You might have done worse than b-b-bread and cheese," he said.

"Worse? Yes, I might have had nothing," she replied with scorn.

As he listened to her talk and wondered if he should now take her hand he thought: "This is just as it used to be before. Can a thing happen again that has happened long ago?" It was merely a simple thought straying into his brain that was tired with suffering. And the simple answer strayed too into his mind: "No, it cannot be." So tired and plain the thoughts came. He hardly knew what they meant, but he

turned away from Rose. He adopted with her a manner of evasive banter, and though she might resent it, her resentment was so fixed on her now that it no longer stirred him with fear as once it had done. She resented big and little things equally; Victor's evasiveness did not trouble her more than the slowness of the waitress at the tea-place they went to.

And what had happened to him in that minute at the studio when he first revolted from Rose he hardly knew. It was a minute in which he turned his face towards eternity, towards the awful, the unknown, because he never again could turn it wandering over the earth in sordid crude pursuit. If he lost Imogen it would not be to pursue happiness wherever it showed its will-o'-the-wisp light; he would no longer follow here and there, everywhere. Being with Rose again was like a vision of that old, searching life—a life that had been nothing but a heap of sordid detail; a man with a soul does not go back to that again.

He did not now make any resolve or act of will. It was simply like seeing something ugly on the floor and not picking it up. He merely yielded inevitably in the hands of his own progression, only thinking quietly: "One cannot go back and be the same."

CHAPTER XII

i

Mr. Jenner had not made any mistake when he engaged Jimmy to look after his books; it had only been another instance of his safe, highly-trained collector's instinct, which enabled him to recognize unerringly the quality he wanted. When Jimmy finally left Norton he had carried out his work there with a specialized skill which it would have been difficult to get from anyone else, so rare a store of out-of-the-way knowledge had he accumulated in his mind during all these years, from childhood onwards.

He came back to town looking forward to all that there was to do; the work was endless and interesting, there would never come a time when it was done, it was work in which one enterprise led to another. And it was never anything but pleasant to exercise that easy, sure knowledge of his which ferreted out mistake and imposture, so that no one had a chance against him who came with any wile. He was perpetually having books put before him by anxious dealers or private people who wished to sell, Mr. Jenner being among the best-known buyers. Jimmy would glance at the book.

"I'm sorry," he would say, "but this isn't quite in my line."

He knew his man. If he seemed, like so many of them, to be relying on a hope to deceive, Jimmy said no more than that, and the position was perfectly understood as the man went silently away with that dogged, enigmatic purposefulness which is neither

hope nor despair. For a different, more ingenuous man Jimmy went on to explain to him exactly how he had been mistaken in the worth of his book. He knew every trap and deception, every freak of taste that governed values, and he had a kind, painstaking way of pointing out what was wrong where he could see that the owner himself had been deceived. And always it was pleasant, that feeling of *knowing*, when he held a book in his hand—the confidence that he could always depend on some fact or memory in his mind to help him to judge unerringly of what was before him.

The conviction that he was now settled in his work, from which he would never wish to change, gave him a sensation of youth passing away. One of youth's chief conditions is that the future is open to every wild and wonderful possibility, that the unknown lies ahead full of surprise, that the things chance holds in store will be things of revelation and joy. But Jimmy now felt himself so settled in his work that possibility and surprise seemed to be blocked out. He could see fairly plainly just what the years would do with him. He was already making a name as an authority on books, and Mr. Jenner's friends and fellow-collectors were often eager for his advice. He had written in the *Athenæum* a letter which turned the scale in a famous dispute of authenticity; in several ways he had come before the notice of the authorities of the British Museum, and he considered impartially that he would soon have a chance of accepting a post there if he should wish it. With his work he was profoundly satisfied for always; but blind hope and illusion, the sense of illimitable chance, were gone—and it was like a parting with youth.

He would not have believed how unhappy and desperate a longing could come through the very negation which he had courted all his life. The thought

of his youth leaving him could goad him to a tortured state of disappointment—sheer, cruel disappointment, he hardly knew on what account. If he considered the question of love and marriage he generally did so rather cynically—love did not last, marriage was the death of romance—that was his opinion: one had only to look around. And then, in the very midst of his thought, sharp and cruel came the pain of disappointment. All his life he had been building up his barricades, and now his own immunity turned round upon him.

He had been glad to resume town life with his mother and Victor in the flat. He loved his mother so much, sometimes as if he were still one of the two little boys who used to hold on to her dress in the street—hold it in a hard, automatic grasp that no distraction could loosen. He held on to her still. But sometimes when he came home in the evening and saw Mrs. Carmichael sitting waiting peacefully and confidently for him, something rose in him rebelliously because he was falling in so exactly with her expectation. She knew just what to expect in his coming and going; if he were delayed coming back in the evening she was somehow faintly pleased because he would naturally have to explain what had kept him, and that would draw him into conversation quicker than he was sometimes drawn in. He had no secret, no surprise in his life. He was ashamed that his mother should know everything that he did. However much he loved her, he dreaded being so identical with her as to have no more passion and romance in these days as they went by than she had, though he was young. She fastened his own habits upon him by always providing for them exactly. Himself, he would have instinctively at this time cast aside some of his daily habits of life, if only as a symbol to reassure himself that he was a man still capable of change and adventure; he distrusted his habits, they seemed to close down

the future. But it was always her pride and duty to provide for them exactly, so that he could not escape them. Sometimes when in their desultory conversation at dinner he had to recount to her and to Victor the successful course of his day, which his mother always expected to hear from him in his own good time, his heart sank with an unusual depression and shame. He had nothing to conceal, there was nothing that was not known, his day had gone well, every plan that he had made for it had been satisfactorily carried out. But suppose it had been different; suppose some other purpose had drawn him away and a wild personal happiness had thrown his plans to the winds, played havoc for a time with his work, but made the hours sharp with a secret joy, then he would not have had that bitter sense of being detached from life and transparent. The detachment which he had sought for its ease and safety had suddenly appeared to him in another guise. It had been pleasant indifference and security, immunity from pain, but now the same thing appeared to be age and negation and death.

One afternoon he met Imogen at the Jenners' house. There were a good many people in the large drawing-room, and for a little while he saw her only from a distance. She had men round her; he knew she was never among people without some men fixing themselves at her side, their eyes watching her—he had so often seen them there. He did not hurry to move. But his easy, friendly manners were so inherent and punctilious a part of him that he would not delay to go up to her a minute after there was a proper opportunity. When the time came he exchanged a few brief words with her and then passed out. He was, above all, securing that they should both be at their ease—he was always able to replace emotion by consummate ease and tact. But when he went home that evening he had something in his heart—some panic

or joy to conceal. For days he was satisfied and required nothing more of Imogen than that.

Then the time came when he wanted something personal and secret in his day again. He wanted it so much that he felt he could have died of the need to see Imogen. He went that afternoon to call on her; it was the first time he had been to see her in town.

Imogen sat breathless: she could not fix her mind on anything that was said, she was all the time a little astray; her cheeks were red and the fair, Madonna-like look of her wide-apart eyes and broad, low forehead gave her a look of young, innocent bewilderment. She was nervous, like a girl of seventeen who loves for the first time. She was thinking: "What will he say at finding me in such rooms as these? No, he will never want to see me again after this; it is the end." She blushed deeply with exaggerated sensitiveness when she thought he was judging her surroundings.

And yet she had changed the room more than she knew, and some of her rich luxuriousness had crept into it since she had been regularly supplied with money by Clifford. The days were gone when she could not buy the things she wanted, and when Edie used to exclaim, with tears of passionate vexation in her eyes, at Imogen's strict conscientiousness in economy. Imogen's horror of getting into debt had almost broken their peace in those days, Edie being a good deal less scrupulous in her views. But now Imogen, quick to realise the most attractive aspects of a fashion, had in her curtains and cushions adopted the newest taste in decoration, which was for strong primary colours by way of reaction from the "art-shades" that had so long been admired.

But whatever embarrassment she might still feel on account of the rooms could not survive that atmosphere of perfect friendship which Jimmy knew so

well how to establish. He had long been master of a peculiar power to reassure, which grafted on to people a sense of confidence in themselves; perhaps it was the chief reason of his attractiveness. And even Edie, whose face had grown sharp with some kind of suppressed feeling when he came in, relaxed under his spell as he sat there talking easily to them. But she remained strangely nervous, which made her careful and accommodating in her speech. Jimmy offered her a cigarette, which she refused.

"And yet some people like smoking," she hastened to inform him reassuringly. "A lot of people are very fond of it."

She wanted to go away and leave them, but before she well had time to do so after tea Jimmy himself took his leave.

As Imogen watched him go she could hardly believe that the door would really close between them and leave her without him. When she was alone she walked up and down the room, she put her hands to her burning cheeks; she felt despair at his going, but her heart was throbbing with the question, "What will be next! When will the next time come?" And Jimmy went home, satisfied again for many days, his dread of her lurking in the background, to keep him away until he must perforce go again.

One day he argued impatiently with himself that it was not possible to love anyone who had come so late and so new into his life, who knew nothing of the past of which he was made, who could not share with him his associations and memories—who, for instance, had never even seen the house he had lived in and loved. Christian Jenner knew his house and his feeling for it—she seemed to fit into his life far better. And Imogen was separated from him not only by her detachment from his past but by the way she lured him and called him to things new. It was not her fault; she probably did not know what she did to

him—how her call sounded in his ears a wild, terrible secret; how to follow her he must leave himself behind and go out like a new man to peril and to joy, with love and suffering receiving him into their relentless hands. He told himself that if he did love her it could only be with something new and unusual in himself, not with all his past, of which he was made for ever. He longed to do anything which would help him to certainty, and the idea occurred to him to take Imogen to the house at South Mimms one day, so that she could see how such a home must be remembered, and perhaps to try to communicate to her how the past must always hold him from things new. Or was it a hope that she might by knowing his house become more easily loved?

ii

But the expedition proved a not very successful one.

Jimmy began the day with his own private thrill of knowledge that it held something special for him. This morning he had none of the confined, irritated feeling that sometimes hung over him at breakfast—only the consciousness of his joyous expectation of seeing Imogen.

It was raining when he called for her, and the details of their journey by cab and train were depressed by the discomfort of the weather. But to Jimmy, who had done the journey in all weathers, the pleasures of recognition were not spoiled; he was enjoying it not for what it was, but because he had done it so many times before. They were travelling by his old route, because he could not have imagined going by any other. A distant pain in her heart seemed to warn Imogen of his aloofness from her.

When they reached South Mimms and were on their way to the house they met Mrs. Fokes. She was

obviously excited by the encounter, as if they were creatures who had come from a more bright and beautiful world than hers, a world with which she would love to be in touch for a little space of time. She asked them to come on to tea with her when they had been to the house; she hung on their answer with transparent excitement which already calculated on her preparations, and her little bustling movements carried her off hurriedly from them as soon as Jimmy had given his pleased acceptance.

Imogen and Jimmy walked on together. The rain had grown so slight and thin that they did not notice it. Imogen thought: "We have never gone out to tea together before." Her heart leapt with joy. She would have liked to speak of it aloud to Jimmy, but her sweet face only took on a look of shining happiness and she remained silent.

As they walked on she felt Jimmy's growing intensity. The streets were ineffably dreary in the light, grey fog that hung over them in their endless monotony. But she caught fully from Jimmy that sense of expectation that hastened their steps. She longed to say to him: "Even before I see it I love your house as much as you do. I love what you love." But again she was silent, because he did not want to know.

"Is it far?" she asked, her expectation in her voice.

For one moment he continued to be engrossed in his search for the first glimpse of the house.

"Just round this corner," he then hastened to answer.

Then Jimmy stood still and gazed at the house as if he were a stranger. It offered no relief to the general gloom of the houses with which it was now surrounded; it looked reduced among buildings taller than itself. Its character still remained to distinguish it from the rest, but blemished and hurt by everything near it. As Jimmy looked he felt there were a thou-

sand things between him and his house—smoke and people and traffic and time and strangeness. . . . Well, the past was closed! It was closed down so that Imogen could never see or understand; she had come too late and would never know. And in his heart he clung bitterly to the past, and banished Imogen.

"Jimmy," she said, "I love your house; I am so glad to see it." She longed to put her hand on his arm, to be in touch with him, but she was afraid.

He looked at the ivy on the wall; he had known it small and young and green; now from its large dark leaves black drops continued to fall after the rain had stopped.

"It's not the same," he said. "I'm afraid I've really brought you an uncomfortable journey for nothing." He looked at her with kind anxiety. "I must get you quickly to a fire. Come alone, we'll go to Mrs. Fokes."

"Yes—yes," she said uneasily. His kindness meant so little.

"Scrutton Grounds used to be there," he said, pointing. "You could not understand how changed——"

"One can only try to imagine," she seemed to plead with him in her beautiful, warm, ingratiating voice.

In Mrs. Fokes' room there was a bright fire and a carefully laid-out tea, with everything already there but the teapot. Mrs. Fokes was still a little too distracted to settle down to conversation, and while Imogen sat by the fire with the children Jimmy wandered round the room and to the bookcase, where lived nearly all the poets who have been printed on India paper. He felt definitely separated from Imogen; he was in a mood of great faithfulness to himself, to all that he had always been, and she was strange and far away. Mrs. Fokes, coming in, was delighted to find him at the shelves. She came and stood beside him.

"Yes," she said, beaming with the pleasure of meeting once more on the common ground of the books, "you'll notice many an old friend there."

They heard Imogen move, and both together they turned to look at her. She had stood up to open a parcel which Jimmy had bought on the way for the children. There were two little girls, and they stood beside her. Mrs. Fokes gazed at the stranger; she saw a woman with a beautiful figure, whose clothes were almost more perfect than she had realized clothes could be, and whose face, with a sweet, timorous look half-seen in the firelight, sent through Mrs. Fokes the thrill of its glamour until she could have gazed at her for ever.

Imogen handed a sweet first to one child. Jimmy saw, with a queer surprise of pain or joy in his heart, that the other child, lost in watching, at the same time put her own empty hand up to her mouth, so keenly did her imagination live the episode, as if it had happened to herself.

At tea the same child sat opposite to him, her little fat face just above the table, her impenetrable blue eyes staring slowly.

"I want some coffee," she said.

Her mother put a little tea in her milk.

"More coffee," she said when she had drunk it. Each time her mother corrected her and told her to say tea.

"More coffee," she said again with her slow stare.

And each time she said "More coffee" Jimmy wanted to throw back his head and laugh at the absurdity of her impenetrable obstinacy.

At last they laughed at her endless repetition, while she stared from one to another. Suddenly her own face relaxed, hovered for a moment on the brink of her laughter, and then her little chuckle came bursting out. Heaven knows what had touched her humour, but she too was in the joke.

CHAPTER XIII

i

VICTOR read:

My dear Victor,—Not to-morrow because I am going out, but come the next day as usual.

I.

The note had been delayed, and it reached him when in a few minutes he would have been setting out to go.

"Oh, my God!" he thought. "How can she do it! Can she really bear that we shouldn't meet to-day!" His hand that held the note trembled from the shock of that late casual doom of hers. He felt a wild impulse to escape it somehow. "If it had come only a little later," he thought, "I should have started already, and then I might have seen her at least for a few minutes." His heart beat fast with dismay at that narrow defeat. He melted with sudden pity for himself. "She doesn't understand," he thought. "I could still go, and explain that to hear only at the last minute—Oh, my God, I can't bear this!"

It seemed at first impossible to go—because there was her note before him, so light, but so definite and final. But as the afternoon wore on his mind accustomed itself to the idea of going later, and the deepening longing to see her so possessed him that as six o'clock came round he only felt again the same expectancy as if he were going as usual to keep an appointment with her.

But when he reached her door at half-past six the landlady told him she was still out.

His longing pressed wildly forward in his heart.

"I must wait," he told her. "I will go upstairs and wait."

He was surprised at her being out. His seeing her had become so inevitable that he had long forgotten that she might not be there.

He waited, standing at the window, which he opened. A grey fog which sometimes fell in thin rain was in the little street.

He had not been there many minutes when a taxi drove up. He knew it must be she, and he expected that Edie would be with her. The street-lamp shone its yellow light just outside. He saw Jimmy get first out of the cab, and then Imogen. Victor turned in from the window as if a deadly shot from an old, old, familiar fate had at last struck the middle of his heart. He did not think; he was like a man who knows his wound is mortal but is not sure yet where the bullet has entered in. The sight of Jimmy there was a vague horror that was somehow familiar; Victor seemed to recognize something that had been happening all his life.

Imogen came up alone; she had said good-bye to Jimmy.

"You've come at last," said Victor. He had by now forgotten that she did not expect him.

And she too forgot mere unexpectedness in her sudden pain and dread as she saw his face. So that, after all, they met each other as if always it had been arranged that they should meet thus in this spot at this minute.

She looked away from him. Were any other eyes in the world so suffering as his could be?—in his eyes, which were still young, sadness looked so old and deep that it broke her heart to look. Was she to fasten that upon him for ever? Would God allow that such

a doom as that should pass from one creature to another? It couldn't be.

He had sunk down on a chair. He was very white.

"I saw Jimmy," he said.

"Yes."

"Imogen—" he began, "Imogen—" He broke down; his head fell forward, and he hid it awkwardly with his arms, a sight at which she gazed in horror.

"What were you going to say?" she asked sharply.

She heard him crying. She wrung her hands together in a passion of grief.

"Victor, speak!" she implored him.

"You don't love him?" he asked, lifting his wet face to her simply.

She flung herself on her knees beside him and took him into her arms.

"Yes, I love him!" she said. "My heart has been torn with love for him—oh, my darling, forgive me! But it doesn't matter, I will never leave you now. Victor, Victor, look at me differently!" She clung to him, tears streaming down her face. "Victor! Victor!" she implored him again, crying as if her heart would break.

"Don't let him take you from me," he said, "don't let him take you. To live without loving you—don't you know I can never do that." He looked at her coldly and was rigid beneath her desperate, imploring arms. "If you had any pity you could not send me to this—far worse than death; do you understand? —I shall not be able to die, I shall have to live, but how can I, how can I!—Imogen, have mercy on me!"

"I will, I will!" she cried, "I am telling you I will. Victor, hold me to you. Didn't you feel me kissing you? You will kill me," she said; "you won't move, you won't open your arms to me." Her strangled crying was growing wilder as she felt that she cried in

n.

And suddenly in perfect calm and sweetness his voice fell on her ears.

"Don't cry, my darling, you will be ill."

His whole body softened to her and took her in, and she went close to him with a little moan and was quiet. She was warm and heavy against him. He waited until the recurring echo of her sobbing had almost passed away; his passionless hand caressed her shoulder, whose gentle, warm feeling he knew well.

"You tried to love me, my splendid, noble girl; you tried so much, but how could you? That's over now. I can bear anything if you are happy. You must keep up your heart, my little Imogen, my darling, be brave."

She could bear it now because she was so close to him. It did not matter. She only moved her head slightly, for the greater closeness which mere movement gives.

"So never cry again for me! Poor little Imogen, I shall never torture you like this again."

This too could pass, because he was so close. He knew now that he could say anything so long as he endured this embrace of hers.

"It wounds you to see my suffering, so it must no longer be before your eyes." Now he need say no more.

Her arms half-drowsily pressed him to her breast, and she lay still. He let her stillness grow deeper and deeper. It was peace now, he knew, but he wondered when, imperceptibly to him, it would turn into the stillness of despair instead. He waited. He knew just when she was so still that he could leave her.

ii

He had the very uttermost pain of loss—a thing that cannot be imagined, only felt. To most people it is not known in its completeness until death removes

what they love, and they turn to face an awful, empty world with their hearts imploring in common mercy for a release into that space and silence where a soul has vanished that was all they loved.

Victor had the utmost pain. His fate was at last implacable and fixed. He saw his life, incredible, waiting ahead for him, and the world full of things and people and all its impossible movement and its perfect emptiness for him, and his heart went sick with horror.

iii

The thought of Victor was always lying quietly at the bottom of her heart as time went on. In spite of all the love that he had heaped upon her he had thrilled her so little in all their time together, and even now as she pictured him in his pain he could not thrill her—he only lay about her heart, dead yet persistent.

Her days were tense with the development of her own love and Jimmy's. Time was deranged for her, sometimes her nights were more wakeful than her days; she lived in a passion of waiting and suspense and triumph and pride. But in the midst of that there might always come the pause, the consciousness, the weight, the quiet long pain, the awe of something eternal.

Imogen was full of the brilliant energy of the cold, sunny, winter days; she went out walking in the early dark of the frosty afternoons, her furs close about her, her beautiful figure distinguishing her from a far distance, her fine light, eager walk taking her from one interest to another.

But at every point some memory awaited her. Their partnership had been too long and too close; everything spoke of it. The things she did, either out of doors or at home, seemed to refuse to let him go; they would whisper to her something that brought him back exactly as he had been. And it dismayed

her, as these memories came drifting in, like dead leaves rustling sadly and endlessly by, to find how many were memories of bitterness and resentment. How could anything so untrue to their hearts have made up so much of their intercourse! At the time the disputes had seemed less actual and important, a mere disguise through which his heartbreaking tenderness was liable to come at any moment, or her deep compassion. But now, looking back, the sheer amount of time occupied by their coldness saddened and appalled her; she was afraid of what those memories must be to him. Did they put an extra refinement upon his torture, wherever he was? Tears came into her eyes as with her whole heart she spoke to him through all the space of winter darkness that lay between them.

"Never have the pain of a single regret! We only suffered, we only suffered!" her spirit went crying out over space to find the spot where he still somewhere lived and moved.

She could never be sad for long, for with a thrill of the purest joy Imogen would give herself up to thoughts of her security coming nearer and nearer each day. Jimmy came to her every day now at the end of his work. She had there before her pure, eager eyes the vision of his face, handsome, pleading, passionate, reluctant. Each evening there passed into her the bright, serene soul that she possessed whenever she saw his reluctance, which cast a half-sulky shadow across the face that she loved, turn into overmastering happiness. She could always now wait confidently for that.

"Why do you take my heart by storm!" he had cried to her once in impotent, hopeless protest, but with a look which she could never forget—a strange, beautiful look of the glory of defeat.

She had only smiled to herself in her pride. But at the sight of her smile he had buried his head on her

breast, and he was hers in the perfect abasement of love. She saw him troubled and touching, looks of intimacy and joy coming to birth before her very eyes—things coming for the first time, humble, questioning, uncertain.

And Imogen began to go like one who has heard from an urgent secret angel the annunciation, and who waits.

CHAPTER XIV

i

"*But why—why Jimmy?*"

While Victor was preparing an outfit, hurrying to and fro between the offices of the New Malay Plantation Company in the City and shipping offices and shops, he blocked thought out of his days by the sheer tension of his hurry and the effort to get everything done. For he was only just in time. A few days later and a small trading vessel would have steamed out for the far Malacca Straits without him, with another man than he on board. Only by a chance had he heard of the opportunity to go—and what a fantastic world it was in which such a far journey should hang on a chance so slight, not only for himself but for some other unknown man, all unconscious how Fate was working darkly above his head, who would be found somewhere if Victor did not go.

But as he hurried, rushing in cabs from one place to another, having so many things to buy that it seemed as if not one of the possessions that had served him in this full, handy world was appropriate to the world of unpeopled solitudes where he was going, there did flash into his mind terrible lightning hints of the questions to which he knew he must one day find an answer. There must be some kind of settlement and explanation. He took his doom blindly now, but there must come a time when he looked at it through and through. He knew well that he would not be able to persist in cheating it of its fulness and its meaning, as now by the pressure of time he could

do for these few days. Very soon there would be long, merciless leisure. Nights at sea. There would not be much he could baulk suffering of when at last it had him there—had him to itself in a little cabin on the ocean, in the desolation of vast, invisible water and crying wind. He would then have to face his doom—no escape. He would get to know it in its very perfection, its completeness, its logical consistency, its purpose, its meaning. Sometimes even now he felt the precision waiting afar off of its full, perfect explanation. O God! he would rather be the broken plaything in a great scheme of meaningless chance than feel this awful premonition that there was an explanation and a purpose governing all.

He was employed as an agent to a company of importers. The man who was to have gone had died after two days' illness in the pride of his strength, and the distracted company had almost despaired of finding anyone in time to enable them to make use of their chartered accommodation and interest in the vessel. Victor had two missions, one ostensible, the other hidden. The ordinary duty of taking out payment and instructions to the workers on that far peninsula and on the scattered islands where tea and coffee planting were spreading fast, to report on the conditions and institute any improvements that were possible, was quite straightforward, mostly a matter of carrying out the full, concise instructions he bore with him in his trunk. But he had another purpose. For some time the company had entertained an incredible but necessary suspicion in regard to the native manager on one of the islands. They believed him to be employing a secret ingenious system of torture of the native labour, so horrible in its cunning and cruelty that no defect on the outward face of things was to be seen by any careless observer. It needed tact and courage on the spot to discover the truth. It was this unusual element in the expedition

that made Bayliss, who had a small concern in the company, mention it to the Carmichaels. When Victor decided to go himself they thought his imagination was suddenly fired by the adventure of travel. He had always wanted to be in everything. They thought that in addition he enjoyed the notion of tracking down a clever fiend on a far island, that the man's ingenious cruelty had somehow become a matter of consuming interest to him, as it was to the Company at home. They knew how he always felt he could carry through anything. They did not know that when he found himself put out to sea it only came to him sometimes in a dazed way to consider what was ahead, and that to remember where he was bound for, or what his mission was, he had to hold his head and wonder. . . .

ii

He had always known since the blow fell on him that there was an explanation waiting for him to find it, but the idea that he was not merely the victim of meaningless chance was at first altogether intolerable to him. But now in the endless monotony of days at sea, when the little vessel carried him interminably by a long, indirect route towards his destination, he had no refuge from the voice in his ear. It was like a voice because its speech seemed to come more from outside him than from within.

Things came to his apprehension very slowly—one thing one day, and after many days something else. It was like a conversation renewed between long pauses.

"What is all this cruel failure? Why is everything withdrawn from me?"

"How much you have loved the world and desired everything for yourself!" The answer came to him perceptibly, he did not know how; it was as if it had missed his ears but yet found his soul. "And you

have loved immortality so little!" went on that answer before it fell again on silence. And he did not know if what had been said had not its own strange sweetness.

He often had to spend a week or two in port while the vessel was serving other ends than his. But whatever fresh he saw was less real to him than a new consciousness that was making itself felt in his soul.

"Why am I singled out?" he cried.

"You are not; or each one is singled out to go from what he was to something better."

What were these quick, inevitable answers like? They reminded him of something long ago. His eyes, looking out from his thin, browned face with their sad, straight tenderness, took on a look of vague remembrance as his mind went back through the past towards childhood.

From one set of islands he had to travel on to another. Each new stage in his journey was like a new exercise in learning to wait about. Oh, the indifferent, cheerful, imperturbable delays that were thrust upon him there as naturally as if they were the growth of the soil—how little the precise time-table of town life had taught him how to wait and wait and wait. Once, after waiting ten days to go across the water to the next island, he went down to the shore to embark at the appointed time and was told they were staying for three more days. That other island was only a few miles across the water; it was as like this one he was on as one cocoanut is like another. In secret he broke down in the weak misery and anger of disappointment. But that was near the beginning. He soon got over that.

One day, when he had been two months away, they entered at midday into the port of a small town the warm flesh-coloured walls of which were rosy in the sun. Before landing he saw signs of more life than there had been wherever they had touched lately. The bustle and confusion on the quay sent a faint promise to him.

There might be some one new to talk to. It was here that he found letters from home, and learnt that they were to be married.

Another long, blind pause of mere torment in his brain. And then there burst from him the question which hitherto had only flashed incontinently in and out of his mind.

"*But why Jimmy? Why should not he too——?*"

The swift, inexorable answer came, and it was like the quick-coming answers of the old, old days. Was he a boy again sitting at the table in the library, his head propped on his hand, stammering aloud the question marked *Q*, longing for it to be unanswerable, while just underneath there was *A*, always there, waiting, ready, full, apt, impossible to dismay, swift and deadly to reply?

And just as then it had not been possible even for a moment to embarrass the response, however defiantly he had put the sound of challenge into his question, so now he could not embarrass Fate, who was ready. The answer was upon him. He knew that while he was to advance through the denial to him of personal happiness in the world, Jimmy's advance was different, but as real—it was to enter into happiness.

THE END

Selections from the Press-notices of Miss Viola Meynell's two previous novels, "Modern Lovers" and "Columbine," are printed on the following pages. These are published by Martin Secker price Six Shillings each

SOME PRESS OPINIONS OF

MODERN LOVERS

"This book secures Miss Meynell's position as one of the most observant of the younger novelists." DAILY NEWS

"Miss Meynell again excites our wonder by the extraordinary intimacy she shows in her studies of character." ATHENÆUM

"With 'Modern Lovers' she takes her definite place among those writers who count by reason of accomplishment and not of mere promise." STANDARD

"The book is a distinguished one, and Miss Meynell need have no fear of her literary future. She has 'arrived.'" OBSERVER

"The author triumphs over every difficulty; the success of her artistry is almost startling." PALL MALL GAZETTE

"Miss Meynell is an artist . . . the book has splendid qualities." MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

SOME PRESS OPINIONS OF
COLUMBINE

"It is a book of beauty . . . and modern life and love seem well worth while when seen thus through so gracious and tender a temperament." MORNING POST

"As good as anything we have read in modern fiction . . . Miss Meynell compels us to judge her work by the highest standards. . . . There are some exquisite pages in this volume descriptive of the hearth and garden in language that conveys an intimate love of the English home and English flowers." SATURDAY REVIEW

"It is not often a novel, even a good novel, can be called beautiful . . . but for 'Columbine' it is the obvious adjective . . . the beauty is as natural as the scent of a garden and as intimately moving as a remembered tune." NEW STATESMAN

"Miss Viola Meynell brings to her analysis of character an astonishingly acute observation and insight, an intense sympathy, a quiet, leavening, sometimes faintly malicious humour; and to her synthesis a conscientious and dexterous artistry in selection and arrangement which gives a vividly objective reality to her creations." PUNCH

THIRD IMPRESSION

SPRING NOVELS
M C M X V I
SIX SHILLINGS EACH

The Dark Forest
By Hugh Walpole

Narcissus
By Viola Meynell

Security
By Ivor Brown

The Iron Age
By F. Brett Young

Making Money
By Owen Johnson

The King's Men
By John Palmer

L. S. D.
By Bohun Lynch

Casuals of the Sea
By William McFee

The True Dimension
By Warrington Dawson

Meleager
By H. M. Vaughan

The Little Demon
By Feodor Sologub

The Created Legend
By Feodor Sologub

Tales of the Revolution
By M. Artzibashef

Collected Tales
By Barry Pain

Introducing William Allison
By William Hewlett

M A R T I N
S E C K E R
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET

H 11823

THE BORROWER WILL BE CHARGED AN OVERDUE FEE IF THIS BOOK IS NOT RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY ON OR BEFORE THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW. NON-RECEIPT OF OVERDUE NOTICES DOES NOT EXEMPT THE BORROWER FROM OVERDUE FEES.

WIDENER
CANCELLED
JUN 27 1985

WIDENER
BOOK DUE
SEP 1 1991

3 2044 011 695 566